

Overcoming Anger

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“OVERCOMING ANGER”

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WHAT IS G4?

G4 groups provide a small group atmosphere where individuals invest a season of their life in overcoming a particular life-dominating struggle of sin or suffering. They provide a safe environment where members learn insights and skills that will allow them to more fully engage in biblical community.

G4 has 7 core values which guide each group:

Bible-Based & Gospel-Centered: Programs and information do not change people. God changes people through the power of the Gospel and the wisdom of His Word. The relational structure of G4 Groups is the vehicle God has ordained to transport the Gospel and Scripture into the lives of His beloved, enslaved, and hurting children.

Recognize the Difference Between Sin & Suffering: G4 Groups recognize that struggles of sin are different from struggles of suffering in terms of cause, dynamics, emotional impact, relational influence, and other ways. While every believer is simultaneously a saint, sinner, and sufferer, there are fundamental differences (practically and theologically) between a struggle an individual does (sin) and those that happen to the individual (suffering).

Built On Honesty & Transparency: The courage to be honest about our suffering or sin is often the essential expression of faith God calls for in overcoming a life-dominating struggle. G4 Groups create an environment that fosters honesty and transparency by incarnating the love of God and protecting confidentiality within the group.

Uphold Confidentiality: We all have a story to tell. G4 Groups are a safe place where group members can be open, honest, and transparent without fear that their issues will be shared outside of the group. G4 group members commit to hold in confidence things shared within the context of the group environment.

Avoid Struggle-Based Identity: We recognize that when an individual has struggled with one issue for an extended period of time that struggle begins to define them. G4 Groups are structured in content, duration, and philosophy to alert the participants to this temptation and guide them away from it. G4 Groups strive to teach and model what it means to live out of an identity as a dearly loved child of God.

Blend Discipleship, Accountability, & A Guided Process: G4 Groups are more than a Bible study on a given subject. They develop a practical theology of their subject during the group study and guide members through an intentional process during the personal study while the members hold each other accountable.

Transition Into Larger Small Group Ministry: The goal is for each G4 Group member to be in a general small group within a year. Group members may choose to be a general small group the whole time. If desired, at “graduation” the G4 Group leader would direct the participant to a small group with a leader who has completed personal study and counseling exercises for that area of struggle. It would be the participant’s choice whether to disclose that was the reason for choosing that leader’s small group.

The 9 Steps of G4

We do not believe there is a one-size-fits-all solution to the struggles of life. Neither do we believe there is any magic in these particular steps. However, we do believe that these steps capture the major movements of the Gospel in the life of an individual. We also believe that it is through the Gospel that God transforms lives and modifies behavior as He gives us a new heart.

In G4 Groups we attempt to walk through the Gospel in slow motion with a concentrated focus upon a particular life-dominating struggle. We do this in a setting of transparent community because we believe God changes people in the midst of relationships.

We believe that the Gospel speaks to both sin (things we do wrong) and suffering (painful experiences for which we are not responsible) to bring peace, wholeness, and redemption. We also believe that every person is both a sinner and a sufferer. However, we believe the Gospel is best understood and applied when we consider how the Gospel relates to the nature of our struggle. The nine steps below are those used by G4 Groups to address struggles of sin and suffering.

Sin-Based Groups	Suffering-Based Groups
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1. ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1. PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my sin.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 4. REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented Him.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 4. LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 5. CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED for harm done and seek to make amends.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 5. MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 6. RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God’s grace and Word to transform my life.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 6. LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 7. IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 7. IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 9. STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 9. STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p>

To learn more about G4 Groups visit www.summitrdu.com/g4

“Where Do I Begin?”

In life and counseling, finding the starting point can be difficult. Life is fluid enough that identifying where to begin with a life-dominating struggle can feel like finding the beginning of a circle. In order to help you with this very important question, Freedom Groups have developed a progression of five levels of starting points.

A struggle in one of the higher categories may have many expressions or contributing causes in the lower categories, but unless the upper level concerns are addressed first (i.e., substance abuse should be addressed before conflict resolution skills), efforts at change have a low probability of lasting success. The degree of self-awareness usually increases as you go down the page. The level of denial usually increases as you move up the page.

1. **Safety** – When the basic requirements of safety are not present, then safety takes priority over any other concern. Safety is never an “unfair expectation” from a relationship. If safety is a concern, then you should immediately involve other people (i.e., pastor, counselor, or legal authorities).

This category includes: thoughts of suicide, violence, threats of violence (to people or pets), preventing someone from moving freely in their home, destruction of property, manipulation, coercion, and similar practices.

2. **Substance Abuse / Addiction** – After safety, the use of mind or mood altering substances is the next level of priority concern. Substance abuse makes the life situation worse and inhibits any maturation process. The consistency and stability required for lasting change are disrupted by substance abuse.

This category includes: alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription drug not used according to instructions, inhalants, driving any vehicle with any impairment for any distance, and similar activities.

3. **Trauma** – Past or present events resulting in nightmares, sleeplessness, flashbacks, sense of helplessness, restricted emotional expression, difficulty concentrating, high levels of anxiety, intense feelings of shame, or a strong desire to isolate should be dealt with before trying to refine matters of character or skill. Trauma is a form of suffering that negatively shapes someone’s sense of identity and causes them to begin to constantly expect or brace against the worst.

This category includes: any physical or sexual abuse, significant verbal or emotional abuse, exposure to an act of violence, experience of a disaster, a major loss, or similar experience.

4. **Character** – This refers to persistent dispositions that express themselves in a variety of ways in a variety of settings. Because both the “trigger” and manifestation change regularly and hide when convenient, it is clear that the struggle lies within the core values, beliefs, and priorities of the individual. Skill training alone will not change character.

This category includes: anger, bitterness, fear, greed, jealousy, obsessions, hoarding, envy, laziness, selfishness, pornography, codependency, depression, social anxiety, insecurity, and similar dispositions.

5. **Skill** – With skill level changes there will be a high degree of self-awareness that change is needed in the moment when change is needed. However, confusion or uncertainty prevents an individual from being able to respond in a manner that it is wise and appropriate.

This category includes: conflict resolution, time management, budgeting, planning, and similar skills.

Hopefully, after reading these five points, you will have less of a “jump in anywhere and try anything” mentality towards your struggles. Change is hard but knowing where to start helps to establish confidence. Remember, you are not alone. Christ will meet you and the church will walk with you at any of these five points.

A more detailed version of this material can be found at bradhambrick.com/traige2.

Step I

“I’m not angry! I’m just frustrated!”

Learning to ADMIT my anger is anger and that it is mine.

“Not overcoming my sinful anger would be more costly than anything God would take me through in the pursuit of His freedom. God is good for having brought me to this point of admitting my sin.”

Memorize: James 1:19-21 (ESV), “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. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Beloved” – God cares immensely for those who struggle with anger.
- “Every person” – Self-control is not a punishment or extra task God is placing upon you.
- “Quick to hear” – The opposite of anger is genuine concern for others and compassion.
- “Does not produce” – Regardless of the immediate response you get, sinful anger does not “work.”
- “Put away all” – Your goal is larger than taming a few peak outbursts of anger.
- “Receive with meekness” – Meekness is power under control marked by humility.

Teaching Notes

“The very fact that [God gets angry] tells us that anger can be utterly right, good, appropriate, beautiful, the only fair response to something evil, and the loving response on behalf of evil’s victims (p. 1).” David Powlison in *Anger: Escaping the Maze*

“Of the seven deadly sins, anger is probably the most fun. To lick your wounds, smack your lips over grievances long past, roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontation still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.” Frederick Buechner in *Untitled Newsletter Article*

“Both revealing anger and concealing anger offend God and sabotage relationships, and call for specific biblical steps of correction and replacement (p. 79).” Robert Jones in *Uprooting Anger*

“We are the common element in all our communication problems (p. 40).” Paul Tripp in *War of Words*

“Suppression does not help anger to dissipate over time. Instead, anger turns into bitterness, hatred, and revengeful obsession. In fact, unresolved or denied anger can become a destructive force that can tear your life apart through depression, anxiety, paralyzing fear, physical ailments, or symptoms of post-traumatic stress (p. 125).” Justin & Lindsey Holcomb in *Rid of My Disgrace*

Embedded Study

Do you hear yourself in any of these statements?

- I’m not angry! I’m just frustrated!
- But if you don’t stop asking “what’s wrong” I may get angry.
- Why can’t I have a bad day without it being a big deal?
- Your family was just perfect and didn’t do conflict, so that’s why you’re so sensitive.
- You knew I was this way when you married me. Am I not good enough for you anymore?
- So you’re saying I’m just a lazy idiot and you’re life would be better off without me.
- [Silence] Fine! I just won’t say anything if I’m so sensitive!
- How many times have I told you not to do that?! Are you stupid or just don’t care?!
- Oh, and I guess you never make a mistake.
- I’m sick of being the only one who ever says “I’m sorry”
- You’re not going to talk me like I’m a child. I left my parents house a long time ago.
- Get outta of my face. Get away from me. Shut up.
- You’re disgusting. You’re lucky I am willing to put up with you
- We’re done! It’s over! I’m finished with you! You’re dead to me!
- Why do you make me talk to you this way? Do you think I enjoy being angry?
- I don’t care who sees me or hears me. I’m mad. I’m not going to be fake about it to suit you.
- If you didn’t want to know what I thought, why ask questions? You’re just setting me up
- I’m only interrupting you because what you’re saying doesn’t make any sense.
- Why would you think like that? That’s just dumb!
- We’ll just see what happens the next time you need help from me.
- You needed me there at 9:00, huh? Guess I just forgot because I was so hurt from last night.
- I just don’t want to talk about it. You figure it out.
- Maybe I do. Maybe I don’t. It’s none of your business.
- [Looking away obviously not listening]
- I’m just a loner. Get away from me.
- I’ll try not to be such a screw and interfere with your life again.
- Don’t you walk away from me. We’re going to finish this conversation [blocking door]...

What would you add as the characteristics phrases and actions of your anger? _____

Assessing Your Level of Motivation

“Quitting smoking is easy. I’ve done it a couple dozen times,” captures well the pattern of trying to change. We want to, but we don’t. We’re motivated, but we’re not. We think we should, but wish people would just leave us alone. This mindset is called “ambivalence” – feeling two contradictory emotions about the same thing. Even if we didn’t know what ambivalence was, we’re good at it.

Read James 1:5-8. This is often a guilt passage. We read it and think, “If it applies to me, I should freak out because it sounds really bad.” Start with verse five and realize the passage begins with presenting God as generous. God is not upset about supplying what we need in our double-minded moments. This will help you not doubt that there is hope for your fickle desire to change (v. 6). God is a gentleman. He won’t change us against our will (v. 7). But God is also loving and warns us against the dangers of our double-minded tendency. At this stage in your journey, you’re just getting comfortable admitting what God already knows. There is hope because God is not surprised even if we are surprised when we admit how bad things have gotten. Hope begins where you are and God will always join you there.

You need to name this tendency early in your journey or this attempt will merely be the latest edition of your good intentions. Don’t feel ashamed of your conflicted motives. God already knows and he still wants to help. The only person you can lie to is yourself and those who love you. In this section, you will look at five levels of motivation from Carlo

DiClemente in *Addictions and Change* (bold text only – yes, this is an addiction resource but the concept is also helpful for anger). In the parentheses, we’ll map out how these correlate with the nine step journey of this study.

1. **Pre-Contemplation** (before you started): This is the stage when you don’t anticipate making any changes in the foreseeable future because you don’t think they are needed. You are probably annoyed and offended if someone suggests that you change. “Change” as a concept is either not on your radar or is met with resistance.
2. **Contemplation** (Step 1): Now you are beginning to believe that change might be beneficial and are wondering what the process might look like. You are trying to decide if change is “possible,” and, if so, if it’s “worth it.” You want to know what would be required and whether these sacrifices would produce a more satisfying life.
3. **Preparation** (Steps 2-4): In this phase your consideration becomes more concrete. You gather the information necessary to enact an effective and sustainable plan. You assess obstacles; both logistical (external) and motivational (internal). You begin to enlist people to come alongside of you for the journey.
4. **Action** (Steps 5-7): At this point plans come to life; ideas become choices. Progress is made and setbacks are navigated. There are successes and failures, but the trajectory of your journey is forward. Techniques become habits and habits become a lifestyle. The roles once filled by anger are now filled with healthier and more satisfying ways of managing life.
5. **Maintenance** (Steps 8-9): A new lifestyle is embraced. Increasingly your emotions and thought patterns conform to this new lifestyle. Anger is no longer an “acceptable escape valve.” At this stage you begin the work of restoring relationships and pursuing interests that were damaged or made impossible by your anger.

Exercise: In the margin beside these five levels of motivation write “today” beside where your motivation is now. Write significant dates or events in the margin that came to mind when you read each description. Chances are this is not your first attempt at this journey. Recognizing where you will begin to cover new motivational-terrain is important. Begin now realizing that every set back is an opportunity to learn. There is no shame in falling; only quitting.

Anger Evaluation

Instructions: Read the following descriptive statements. As you read them, think of times when you are facing agitation or disappointment; *being calm when nothing is wrong is not a sign of overcoming anger or self-control*. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

(N) almost never, (R) rarely, (S) sometimes, (F) frequently, or (A) almost always.

For the most accurate results, ask one person from each major sphere of your life (i.e, home, work, social, church small group, etc...) to complete this survey on your behalf and compare results. If you chose to enlist others, you must be willing to hear their perspective without arguing or debating. One sphere does not negate another. For instance, a good report from a friend does not mean your spouse is inaccurate about your anger.

An on-line, self-scoring version of this evaluation can be found at: bradhambrick.com/angerseminar.

1. People generally irritate me.	N	R	S	F	A
2. I get upset about “stupid” people.	N	R	S	F	A
3. I struggle with a lack of patience.	N	R	S	F	A
4. My mind drifts to critical thoughts.	N	R	S	F	A
5. My mind drifts to replaying past offenses against me.	N	R	S	F	A
6. I struggle with discouragement when something bothers me.	N	R	S	F	A
7. I am fault-finding with others.	N	R	S	F	A
8. I call my anger by many other names.	N	R	S	F	A
9. I disagree with people when they say I’m upset.	N	R	S	F	A
10. I act kind outside (behavior) when angry inside (thoughts).	N	R	S	F	A
11. I don’t like to let others know what bothers me.	N	R	S	F	A
12. I let days pass without addressing an offense.	N	R	S	F	A
13. My friends would be surprised by my struggle with anger.	N	R	S	F	A
14. I avoid conversations about personal or sensitive subjects.	N	R	S	F	A
15. I vent at or to others when I’m upset.	N	R	S	F	A
16. I am easily frustrated.	N	R	S	F	A
17. I yell when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A

18. I am rude when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A
19. I misrepresent others intentionally when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A
20. I oversimplify issues to be right when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A
21. I use curse words when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A
22. I call names when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A
23. I make degrading comments when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A
24. I blame others when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A
25. I show my anger in public.	N	R	S	F	A
26. I insist I am right when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A
27. I get intense when discussing a controversial topic.	N	R	S	F	A
28. I will slander those I am angry at.	N	R	S	F	A
29. I speak too sternly or insensitively.	N	R	S	F	A
30. I am quick to “put someone in their place” if I feel disrespected.	N	R	S	F	A
31. I think I am trying to help when I’m angry.	N	R	S	F	A
32. I often get caught up in silly arguments.	N	R	S	F	A
33. I have a reputation for being strong willed.	N	R	S	F	A
34. I have an opinion I am willing to share on many subjects.	N	R	S	F	A
35. I have to prove I am right or have the last word.	N	R	S	F	A
36. I interrupt others during a disagreement.	N	R	S	F	A
37. I am arrogant.	N	R	S	F	A
38. I only consider my own view point when angry.	N	R	S	F	A
39. I have a sharp tongue or smart mouth.	N	R	S	F	A
40. I pout when upset.	N	R	S	F	A
41. I will give the “silent treatment” when I am angry.	N	R	S	F	A
42. When displeased I “shut down.”	N	R	S	F	A
43. I intentionally avoid someone during a conflict.	N	R	S	F	A
44. In a disagreement I stop listening.	N	R	S	F	A
45. I often want to quit or say “I’m done” in a relationship.	N	R	S	F	A
46. I am an independent person.	N	R	S	F	A
47. I keep other people at arm’s length.	N	R	S	F	A
48. I talk in generalities when upset about something.	N	R	S	F	A
49. I manipulate others to do what I want.	N	R	S	F	A
50. I force others to end friendships to prove loyalty.	N	R	S	F	A
51. I force others to break ties with family (parents or children).	N	R	S	F	A
52. I make decisions for my spouse.	N	R	S	F	A
53. I will punish others by restricting access to money.	N	R	S	F	A
54. I pressure others to give up things important to them.	N	R	S	F	A
55. I refuse to take a break or give space in an argument.	N	R	S	F	A
56. I refuse to admit to things I’ve done.	N	R	S	F	A
57. I don’t like hearing opposing points of view.	N	R	S	F	A
58. I think things must always be “fair.”	N	R	S	F	A
59. I will degrade someone I care about in public.	N	R	S	F	A
60. I ignore or dismiss things that are important to others.	N	R	S	F	A
61. Sarcasm is a characteristic trait of my humor.	N	R	S	F	A
62. I procrastinate about things I don’t want to do.	N	R	S	F	A
63. I am deliberately evasive about my emotions.	N	R	S	F	A
64. I will stare away during a conversation I don’t want to have.	N	R	S	F	A
65. I criticize people behind their back but not to their face.	N	R	S	F	A
66. I refuse to help someone I’m upset with to get under their skin.	N	R	S	F	A
67. I do indirect things to make my displeasure known or release it.	N	R	S	F	A
68. I use body language to communicate my displeasure.	N	R	S	F	A
69. I have broken or thrown things in an argument.	N	R	S	F	A
70. I use physical posturing to intimidate another person.	N	R	S	F	A
71. I restrict others from leaving a room when I’m upset.	N	R	S	F	A
72. I have hit, slapped, or squeezed during an argument.	N	R	S	F	A
73. I have mentioned or held a weapon during an argument.	N	R	S	F	A
74. I have made verbal allusions to physical harm during an argument.	N	R	S	F	A

75. I have threatened to harm myself during an argument.	N	R	S	F	A
76. I have harmed myself to win/end an argument.	N	R	S	F	A
77. I have driven recklessly during an argument.	N	R	S	F	A

Key to Survey Scoring: Give yourself one point for an “S” response, two points for an “F” response, and three points for an “A” response. If your total score matches the total number of questions, that is an area of concern. If your total score comes close to doubling the total number of questions, it is a significant concern. If your total score more than doubles the total number of questions, it should be considered a life-dominating struggle. An on-line, self-scoring version of this evaluation can be found at: bradhambrick.com/angerseminar.

➤ Questions 1-7: (Total: _____ in 7 questions)

This set of questions describes anger that expresses itself through **grumbling**. This low-grade, pervasive focus upon dissatisfaction creates a negative lens by which we begin to interpret life. This perpetual criticism of God’s sovereignty will erode humility and joyful submission to God which are essential for healthy expressions of anger.

Intensity Evaluation: [The N-R-S-F-A scale focuses primarily upon *frequency*, so beneath the description of each anger struggle, there will also be an *intensity evaluation*. An infrequent but intense struggle with anger can be just as disruptive and problematic as a frequent, less intense struggle.] Does your grumbling negatively affect the mood of your friends, family, or co-workers? Does your mood set the tone for the rest of your household? Has your grumbling resulted in prolonged struggles with depression? Have you lost friendships because of being a “negative person”? Do you have a hard time enjoying good situations because of an expectation of negative outcomes?

➤ Questions 8-14: (Total: _____ in 7 questions)

This set of questions describes anger that *conceals* itself through **suppression**. Mislabeling or denying an emotion impairs our ability to respond to that emotion in a God honoring fashion. If you call the Chicken Pox a common rash, you will not treat it correctly. Whether you are trying to deceive yourself or others, suppression is unhealthy and often results in a chronic expression of anger.

Intensity Evaluation: What are the most painful events that you are not acknowledging? How long will you go without addressing a strain in a relationship? How many people (kids, spouse, or peers) are you teaching to copy your inaccurate, coded language for anger? How lonely or fake do you feel even in your closest relationships?

➤ Questions 15-39: (Total: _____ in 21 questions)

This set of questions describes anger that expresses itself through **active aggression**. This is “classic anger,” hence the largest number of questions. The more frequent and intense our expression of these qualities, the more our emotions become a distraction to correcting the problem we see accurately or the more we reinforce the inaccurate condemnation of a situation we have wrongly labeled.

Intensity Evaluation: How “nasty” or “sharp” are your words when you are angry? How aware are you of distorting what others say when you are angry (higher awareness reveals a more seared conscience; less awareness reveals a harder heart)? How long does it take you to be willing to acknowledge that your anger was sinfully expressed and, therefore, wrong?

➤ Questions 40-48: (Total: _____ in 9 questions)

This set of questions describes anger that *conceals* itself through **distance**. It is natural to want to move away, physically or emotionally, from a problem. However, when safety is not a concern (Matt. 7:6 – see “Where Do I Begin?” in the introduction materials), distance results in us violating our calling to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16) or failing to promote unity within our relationships (Matt. 5:23-26).

Intensity Evaluation: What important relationships (family, work, church, etc...) will you strain in order to avoid conflict? What life changing decisions (divorce, quitting a job, disowning family, etc...) have you made or threatened in order to avoid conflict? How socially awkward or withdrawn are you willing to be in order to avoid having to face personal questions or “real” relationships?

➤ Questions 49-59: (Total: _____ in 11 questions)

This set of questions describes anger that *expresses* itself through **control**. Control is the ultimate expression of God-playing anger. We do not like how the world operates or loved ones respond to us, so we begin charting their course. We create our own version of Hell when our will is crossed and proclaim that people will only be at peace when they conform to our will. Control is rarely overcome without some form of counseling, support group, or other outside involvement.

Intensity Evaluation: How do you speak of and relate to adults as if they were children? Have you refused to allow someone to leave your home until they finish a conversation or concede to what you want? What resource (time, schedule, money, relationships, etc...) do you prevent another to use or access without your permission or prior knowledge? How much is your sense of well-being tied to the awareness of what another person is or is not doing? How intense is your reaction when a loved one uses resources in a way you disagree with or makes a decision without your pre-approval?

➤ Questions 60-68: (Total: _____ in 9 questions)

This set of questions describes anger that *conceals* itself through **passive aggression**. Passive aggression does punish for its displeasure; it just does so through covert operations. The end game is to make the other person feel guilty and change without risking vulnerability by actively participating in an opportunity for restoration.

Intensity Evaluation: How much pain and disruption will you allow your silence to create? What level of task or events are you willing to neglect or procrastinate in order to prove a point? What degree of slander are you willing to communicate through indirect channels to hurt someone with whom you're upset? How blatantly will you lie about not being upset when it is clear that you are? How important are the things you will speak cryptically about and then be upset with others when they do not go well?

➤ Questions 69-77: (Total: _____ in 9 questions)

This set of questions describes anger that *expresses* itself through **violence**. At this point, anger has long since quit being a relational problem (interpersonal dynamics) and has moved from a personal problem (self-control) to a legal problem (civil violation). Anger is expressing, “You are expendable or disposable when you interfere with my desires (Matt. 5:21-22).” If your anger has reached this level, you should begin some form of counseling.

Intensity Evaluation: Has a member of your family ever been to the doctor (or needed to go) after an episode of your anger? How valuable are the objects you have destroyed in the midst of your anger? Could you (or have you ever) been arrested for how you've driven while angry? Have (or should) you ever had legal action taken against your anger: disturbing the peace, restraining order, terroristic threats, etc...? What forms of self-destructive behavior have you engaged in: cutting, burning, overdosing, or attempting suicide?

Does alcohol, drug, steroid, or prescription medicine usage ever affect the frequency, intensity, or type of anger with which you struggle? _____ Yes _____ No

Exercise: Another useful way to capture a “picture” of your experience with anger is to identify the expressions anger takes in your life. Admitting to a struggle with anger is about more than knowing the type and intensity of your anger. You should also be able to see/admit your anger “in real time.”

Circle the words and phrases that represent your anger. Resist the urge of shame to turn a blind eye to your sin. Embrace the freedom of the gospel to admit the extent of your struggle in order to know the magnitude of your Savior.

Expressive Manifestations of Anger

grumbling	whining	judging	bitterness	negativism
hatred	bickering	disgruntled	manipulating	coercing
accusing	sarcasm	cursing	exaggerating	gesturing
hitting	sighing	volume	threats	moralizing
justifying	violence	blaming	gossip	ingratitude
scowling	enlisting allies	ruminating	disrespecting	cruelty
stubbornness	name calling	_____	_____	_____

Concealing Manifestations of Anger

avoidance	escapism	self-righteousness	self-pity	unhappiness
brooding	addictions	despair	rationalizations	running away
apathy	cynicism	sulking	withdrawing	silent treatment
cold shoulder	walking off	_____	_____	_____

Blame-Shifting: No doubt, if this survey revealed a problem with anger, you are already beginning to form excuses and rationalizations for your anger. One of the keys to lasting change is the ability to look at our sin and not explain it away (James 1:23-25). The responses below are characteristic of how you seek to avoid owning your anger. Begin to listen to times when you say or think these kind of things.

- “[Name / event], made me so angry... gets on my nerves.”
- “I am only human. What do you expect?”
- “[Name] really knows how to push my buttons.”
- “The devil really got to me that time.”
- “I’ve got my parent’s temper.”
- “You know I didn’t really mean what I said.”
- “That was just the alcohol talking.”
- “You know how I get when I haven’t had enough sleep.”
- “You know how I get around that time of the month.”
- “I’m a red head, Italian, [other]. You know how we are.”
- “If you didn’t want to know what I think, you shouldn’t ask.”
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- **List:** What situations do you blame for your anger? What people do you blame for your anger? How do you blame God for your anger (“if only” statements)?

Read Genesis 3-4:16 and 6:5-11. Notice the progression from sin (3:6-11) to fear and hiding (3:10) to anger (4:5) to violence (4:8) to a world marked by violence (6:11). Our sinful anger changes the world in which we live and the world in which we force our loved ones to live. Sin grows and spreads. Evil begets evil. It is either destroyed (by grace, not violence) or it spreads. Look at the list of anger expressions you have compiled in the last several pages. How have you begun to see those traits mirrored in those you love? Ask this question not to justify your anger (“they get angry too”) but to motivate yourself by love to see change through to the end.

Read Proverbs 19:19-29. Notice that no person or situation on which you have blamed your anger can deliver you from your anger (v. 19). The message is clear – own your anger and stop looking for causes outside yourself. Don’t stop in shame with that message. Practice now, in this passage, what you will have to do many times in the coming weeks – keep your eyes open to learn as you face conviction. That is the message of verse 20 – listen and learn. Walk through the rest of the passage and summarize principles that are relevant to your experience with anger.

Read Judges 21:25. What a sad last verse to a book, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” But isn’t that the theme verse of our anger? We believe we’re right. We believe we’re justified. We do what we feel is called for in the moment. The question in front of you at this step in the process is, “Will you let this be the final sentence of your story? Or, will you subject your life (not knowing yet what that may require) – including your emotions and all they entail – at the feet of King Jesus?”

Accountability Focus (ADMIT):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Do I admit that I have a struggle with anger and have I identified the type(s) of with which anger I struggle?
- Do I blame anyone else when I speak of my anger?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your anger struggle to your accountability partner and commit to restraining it. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____

Step 2

“How Bad Is It, Doc?”

Humbly ACKNOWLEDGING the breadth and impact of my anger problem

“I am beginning to see the extent and impact of my anger.

It is bigger than I wanted to admit [describe] and still may be bigger than I realize.

Apart from God’s grace, I am an angry person.

I acknowledge that there is no safety and no freedom in minimizing my anger [describe].

Before I can truly understand the greatness of Jesus I must acknowledge what His death and resurrection has conquered on my behalf and in my life.”

Memorize: Luke 6:43-45 (ESV), “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “For no” – This is not a principle for which Jesus leaves room for exceptions.
- “Each tree” – There is no comparative scoring between trees. Each tree is known by “its own fruit.”
- “Not gathered” – Fruit does not lie. It is futile to argue with what our lives produce.
- “Heart” – Our words reveal our true priorities, values, agendas, and allegiances.
- “Abundance” – Our heart does not produce things in small amounts. Heart change will be large scale.

Teaching Notes

“The longer anger consumes you, the harder it is to let go of the pride that comes with it. You feel justified (p. 126).” Justin & Lindsey Holcomb in *Rid of My Disgrace*

“Sin attaches to intention, memory, thought speech, intelligent action – to all the special features of personhood – and transforms them into weapons (p. 76).” Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. in *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*

“Our bigger problem is denial or blindness, inability or refusal to see or take personal responsibility for our habitual or repetitive sins. The biblical term is *hardness of heart* (p. 88).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

“Our anger is our whole-personed active response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil (p. 15).” Robert Jones in *Uprooting Anger*

“No doubt, these colorful descriptions do capture how anger feels. But a metaphor is not meant to overpower the thing it intends to illustrate... The ‘burning’ metaphor graphically captures the sensation of anger and its effects, but it’s not intended to cancel out the fact that anger is something people do (p. 12).” David Powlison in “Anger Part 2: Three Lies About Anger and the Transforming Truth” in *JBC* (Winter 1996).

Embedded Study

It is hard to admit how “off” we get when we are angry. One reason is because we often get angry for right reasons or legitimate causes. We must start Step 2 by admitting that a legitimate trigger is only the first test of righteous anger.

Below are seven test questions for righteous anger taken from David Powlison’s article (bold text only) “Anger Part I: Understanding Anger” from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Fall 1995). The journaling tool provided in Step 3 will include these seven tests, but only use the words in parenthesis to reference each test. Your goal here is only to understand each test, so you can use them later to evaluate your anger.

1. **Do you get angry about the right things? (Right Trigger)** Anger declares actions wrong and / or people evil. *Anger is a moral emotion because it makes moral declarations.* Too often our anger is triggered by personal preference or selfishness. In order to be good or right, anger must be in agreement with God about the nature of what it condemns.
2. **Do you express anger in the right way? (Right Response)** Anger should address problems not attack people. Godly anger wants to see sin eliminated and sinners redeemed. If our personal anger degrades or harms another person it is wrong either because it is excessive or because it is personally addressing a matter that should be addressed by the church (Matt 18:15-17) or state (Rom 13:1-7).
3. **How long does your anger last? (Duration)** Sinful anger can be excessive in degree or duration. A long, slow burn is as wrong as a quick, hot flare (although the impact of each is different). While the saying “forgive and forget” is neither possible nor biblical, an offense that is harbored and replayed in one’s mind is bitterness (another flavor of sinful anger). One good measure for bitterness is how many details you remember about the offense.
4. **How controlled is your anger? (Controlled)** Anger can consume you without sinning against anyone else. Anger management techniques rooted in venting or catharsis, often encourage uncontrolled anger. God never “loses it” even in private. The more we use exhaustion-based techniques to squelch anger, the more we build the stamina and power of our anger (and the less we address our heart as the source of anger).
5. **What motivates your anger? (Motive)** We can be angry about the right thing in the right way for the wrong reason. Example: Rudeness in children is wrong. There are many forms of appropriate discipline. However, if our primary motive in disciplining our children is to prevent them from embarrassing us in public, then our anger is sinful. We have made our glory (reputation) and peace the center of the world and emotionally forced it upon our children.
 “Truth that is not spoken in love ceases to be truth because it becomes distorted by human impatience, bitterness, and anger (p. 228).” Paul Tripp in *War of Words*
6. **Is your anger “primed and ready” to respond? (Primed)** Godly anger restores peace; not just externally (life situation) but also internally (emotional disposition). When we settle for anger management that leaves the “fire” just beneath the surface, our solution has left us in perpetual temptation. It is also a good indicator we have only addressed the expression of anger and not the heart (beliefs, values, agendas) that fueled it.
7. **What is the effect of your anger? (Effect)** Godly anger restores the repentant. Godly anger genuinely wants peace more than vengeance. Do you want the offender to repent or pay? Do your words while angry point the other person towards God or focus upon you? Are you just concerned about whether God agrees with you (“I’ve got a verse that says I’m right”) or are you trying to represent God in that moment (2 Cor. 5:18-21)?
 “The clearest gauge of whether anger is right or wrong in its expression is whether it acts to condemn or to offer help (p. 50).” David Powlison in “Understanding Anger: Part I” in *JBC* (Fall 1995).

With this standard as our measure, we are seeking to acknowledge the breadth and impact of our sinful anger. Therefore, we are willing to see how far off base we have gotten. If we refuse to acknowledge this, we will get more angry for how others portray our anger.

If you are hoping this study will make your irrational sin rational – “If my loved ones only understood my upbringing, my personality, my stress level, etc.” – you will be disappointed. More than being disappointed, you will define your struggle in a way that pushes you away from the power of the gospel as the essential element of your transformation.

“We should note that all sin is ultimately irrational... Though people sometimes persuade themselves that they have good reasons for sinning, when examined in the cold light of truth on the last day, it will be seen in every case that sin ultimately just does not make sense (p. 493).” Wayne Grudem in *Systematic Theology*

It gets worse before it gets better. Anger is one of the more irrational sins. Anger’s deep seated pride convinces us we’re right and blinds us to our own actions, words, motives, and distorted interpretations. We become one of the most dangerous things in the world – a blind person who is convinced we see better than anyone else around us.

“Angry people are insane and perverse. You don’t talk sense when you are contentious; malice and distortion subvert and pervert even the attempts at truth (p. 39).” David Powlison in “Getting to the Heart of Conflict: Anger, Part 3” in *JBC* (Fall 1997).

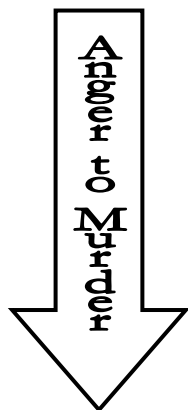
The goal of this step is to further open our eyes to the impact our sin has had on how we think, how we live, and those we love. If you are not firmly rooted in your understanding of the nature of sin and firmly committed to admitting your sin of anger (Step 1), then you will be very tempted to fall back into old blame-shifting patterns. Before going forward, read the section of Step 1 on blame-shifting and add to that list as you feel resistance to this material.

Anger is Something We Do: What images, pictures, or metaphors do you use for anger that portrays anger as “not you” but something in you or upon you? Add to the following list:

hot fluid	demon	fire	beast inside me
burden	natural force	something to bridle	blow off steam
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

The goal for making this list is not to make these words and phrases “off limits” but to make sure we know that they are not true. They may effectively communicate our experience, but they are not what is actually happening. When we allow metaphors to become reality in our mind our goal becomes controlling “it” (anger) instead of inviting God to refine “me.”

Read Exodus 20:13 and Matthew 5:21-22. Jesus says the heart of the command against murder is sinful anger; just as the heart of the command against adultery is lust (Matt. 5:27-30). In both cases, Jesus issues a challenge to take the heart sin seriously. Look at the figure below which follows sinful anger in its budding form all the way to murder. Notice that from each step the next step does not seem “that far.” Add a little more life drama to the current stage of anger and the next stage of anger seems feasible. Next to each step write what actions you have already taken. Consider what is “next” if you do not take seriously the call of Jesus to attack anger at the heart level.



1. **Heart:** Valuing Something More Than God and Someone
2. Aggressive Thoughts
3. Rude Words
4. Intimidating Actions
5. Mild Physical Force In A Moment of Rage
6. Increased Physical Force With Less Provocation
7. Infliction Of Major Non-Life Threatening Injuries
8. Killing Unintentionally In A Moment of Rage
9. Killing Intentionally

Figure 1: Sample Progression from Anger to Murder

List: Compile a list of the consequences that have emerged from your anger. Consider the following areas of life as you create the list: marriage, parents, children, friendships, church, work, health, and guilt. Allow at least two people who have been affected by your anger to add to the list. * Note: You must be willing to hear what they have to say without rebuttal or self-defense. You are seeking information, not proving a case.

List Reflection: How have life struggles not directly caused by or related to your anger been complicated by your anger: relationships, trust, addiction, honesty, stress, view of authority, money decisions, entertainment choices or preferences, sleep patterns, view of God, and approach to planning.

Reflect: We often defend our anger by pointing to people who approve of us or relationships that are going well. The logic is, “If I have at least one healthy relationship, then I don’t have an anger problem.” Simply put, that is bad logic. Anger is expressed where we think we can get away with it, where it is to our advantage, or when we think it is “worth it.” That is usually in the more private and committed relationships (i.e., family and closer friends).

List: Towards whom am I merciful? Towards whom am I merciless?

Read Proverbs 30:11-14. Notice that anger is said to be primarily expressed against family (v. 11) and those who are in a weaker position (v. 14b). Look back over your “merciless list.” How well does this Proverb capture you? The angry person is said to be “clean in their own eyes (v. 12-13).” How hard was it to grade yourself by the seven tests and acknowledge the irrationality of your anger? Angry people are said to have violent mouths (v. 14a). What was your response to seeing where you were on the “anger to murder” figure and to consider what would be next?

Read Proverbs 18:21. How does this Proverb differ from the ways that you have minimized the significance of your words? Go back to your “merciful list” and write “I breathe life” above it. Over your “merciless list” write “I breathe death” above it.

“Angry people churn out mental, emotional, and verbal pollution (p. 38).” David Powlison in “Getting to the Heart of Conflict: Anger, Part 3” in *JBC* (Fall 1997).

Take time to pray for each person or group on your “merciless list.” In Step 5 you will confess to these people. But, for now, in prayer bring them before the same Redeemer who is restoring you. Ask that God would restore what your words/actions have devoured (Joel 2:25), that God will be their sufficient comfort (2 Cor. 1:3), that they would have a redemptive perspective (Gen 50:20), and that God would use your transformation to strengthen their faith in Him.

Case Study: The following case study is meant to help you capture the journey you have made in these first two steps. It will also guide you through Psalm 39 as a demonstration of God’s understanding and compassion for the difficulty during this part of the change process. At the end you will be asked to write Psalm 39 in your words from your own experience similarly to the example given.

Bill didn’t think he was that different from anyone else. Sure, he “lost it” every-once-in-a-while with the kids, but who doesn’t. Idiot drivers deserved a decent heckling (even if they can’t hear it) if they are going to endanger and make everyone else on the road late. His wife, Susan was the sensitive type so you couldn’t really take her opinion too seriously. She probably was uncomfortable with his aggressive-assertive style, but that’s just because her family never really dealt with their issues.

At work people respected Bill. He got things done, so his boss really liked Bill and often told him how good it was to have Bill on staff to keep everyone “on their toes.” Being a self-made man who had to overcome a lot to amount to anything, Bill was proud of these comments. He always feared being nothing or nobody, so these comments told him he was on the right track.

What Bill didn’t like was the way that his boys argued with one another and their mother. The things they said sounded eerily familiar when Bill was willing to admit it. But he shook it off saying he wasn’t going to let his kids have excuses for *their* temper. If he had settled for excuses, he wouldn’t be where he is today.

Then it got to the point where the boys were brave enough to turn their anger on him. He had always been able to intimidate them “back in line.” But now these arguments began to escalate; a couple even turned physical. When Bill told the boys they should honor their father they just rolled their eyes. Eventually they looked up the passage in Ephesians and told him not to provoke his kids to anger and mocked that they could use the Bible too.

Bill came to Susan for support when he was feeling down. She gave him little and said she had warned him many times these days would come. That turned the conversation nasty, but Susan had been silent long enough and wasn’t going to let Bill justify his anger anymore. The argument ended with Bill going for a drive (“storming off” as Susan said).

Some conviction was starting to set in, but Bill was still resisting the idea that he had an anger problem. He has never hit anyone (unless you count the recent wrestling matches with the boys). They had some good times as a family (but nobody could remember those right now). As he drove, Bill thought he should pray, but he didn’t even know where to begin.

Pre-Questions: This case study is meant to challenge you to think biblically about the real struggles of life. These questions will not be answered completely in the sections below. But they do represent the kind of struggles that are being wrestled with in Psalm 39. Use the question both to stir application and to give you new insight into the psalm.

- How would you define an “anger problem;” what level does anger have to reach to be problematic?
- What should Bill do with the fact that he is often right in his assessment of Susan and the boys?
- How should someone deal with the guilt / shame that they feel as they start to take responsibility for their anger?
- What would the next step look like for Bill?

Read Psalm 39 in your preferred Bible translation. The “rewrite” of Psalm 39 below is an attempt to capture the words that God would give Bill to pray (Romans 8:26-27). This would be something Bill would need to pray many times as he struggled to surrender his anger to the Lord.

1. I kept telling myself I'd watch what I say; that I'd try to be less gruff and intimidating. I didn't want to say hurtful things. I was determined to think about what I said before I said it, especially when my family was doing “stupid” stuff.
2. I would do good for a while. I'd keep my mouth shut, but nothing changed and eventually it would get to me. I could only take so much. My silence only dammed up the anger; it didn't decrease it. My sense of injustice mounted.
3. I got madder and madder. I was fuming. The more I thought about it the worse it got. Finally, I just let it go. My sharp tongue knew just where to start cutting. It was like old times. My anger and me were free again.
4. God help me realize these moments are not that big of a deal. I act like these small events are going to define my life. I get lost in the moment. I think one act of disrespect is larger than my relationship with my sons; one instance of having to repeat what I said is larger than my marriage. God, remind me how small I really am; humble me!
5. Life is too short for this kind of foolishness on my part. My anger is more foolish than whatever “stupid” thing they did. I only get 18 years with my boys and a few decades with my wife. How do we always lose sight of what really has value in life?!
6. I don't think any of us get how transient and secondary we are. We act like we are the Real Thing and not just made in Your image. We work and work to make our name great. I was providing well but in my anger devouring those I would leave my wealth to.
7. What do I do now? I'm driving around to stall... for what? You really are my only hope. I need you. I kept thinking everyone in my house needed to listen to me, when I really needed to be listening to you.
8. My anger and the dissension it has caused in my family could destroy everything that is really important to me. Deliver me from the consequences of my sin. All my buddies told me I was right and I shouldn't have to put up with what they were doing. Don't leave me to commiserate my broken family with them.
9. Before I would bite my tongue (thinking I was right and that the world needed to hear what I had to say). Now I am truly quiet, humbled and wanting to listen to You. Only You, Lord, could bring me to this point (my wife and kids tried hundreds of times to no avail).
10. The shame and guilt are too much. I don't think I can bear what I've done. I see myself and it makes me sick. Your hand holds the mirror to my soul and I feel weak.
11. You showed me my sin and it wasn't just my loud words, harsh tone, and physical aggression. You have revealed to me my idols (respect, being heard, organized home, success, and more) and you want to consume them. Those things replaced You in my life and You will not be replaced. Wow! I sure thought I was something.
12. Please listen as I pray. I realize now I do not deserve to be heard (what a change from when I thought everyone needed to hear what I had to say). I am broken and crying. Do not walk away from me like I would from my wife when she cried. I've got a long way to go on this journey of being a godly husband and father. Thank You, Lord, for walking with me; for letting me be Your companion... I guess that is what all of us are doing in this life.
13. Here comes the guilt and shame again. It is hard to walk with You, God, I'm used to being in charge and getting to be right. I'll have to relearn how to be happy with You at the helm and life not being about me. I am completely undone (but I think it's the best thing that's happen to me in a long time.).

Post Questions: Now that you have read Psalm 39, examined how Bill might rewrite it for his situation, and studied several other passages, consider the following questions: (a) How has your perspective on anger changed? (b) How would your answers to the “pre-questions” be different now? (c) How would you re-write your own version of Psalm 39.

Accountability Focus (ACKNOWLEDGE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Do I minimize the impact or significance of my anger?
- Do I avoid examining important areas of my life (skipping relevant questions in this chapter)?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your anger struggle to your accountability partner and commit to restraining it. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____

Step 3

“My Anger Reveals Me”

UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my anger

“I do not know all I need to know about myself or my struggle with anger.

I do know that my heart resists being known (Jeremiah 17:9), and that anger reveals the things that are most important to me (Luke 6:45).

I am coming to realize that [list] desires lead me to sinful anger, and that [list] experiences have contributed to the strength of those desires.

I believe God is more satisfying than those desires could ever be without Him.”

Memorize: Proverbs 14:29-30 (ESV), “Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Whoever” – You are not excluded from this passage. Your anger hasn’t made you unreachable.
- “Slow to anger” – Anger is a rushed emotion. To gain understanding you must slow down.
- “Exalts folly” – Anger imposes its false distorted beliefs on others and punishes them for not agreeing.
- “A tranquil heart” – Godly emotions stem from a heart that is resting and relying upon God.
- “Bones rot” – Stewing on anger, grumbling, and bitterness is physically unhealthy and miserable.

Teaching Notes

“Understanding ourselves doesn’t simply mean getting in touch with our feelings. It also involves becoming aware of the thoughts behind the feelings and recognizing the lies we tell ourselves that feel so true (p. 87).” Leslie Vernick in *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*

“Our desire battles for control until it becomes a demand. The demand is then expressed (and usually experienced) as a need. My sense of need sets up my expectation. Expectation when unfulfilled leads to disappointment. Disappointment leads to some kind of punishment (p. 59).” Paul Tripp in *War of Words*

“Good desires easily become bad masters (p. 104)... To receive God’s forgiving grace, you must own your anger. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. We must not blame past or present circumstances (p. 70).” Robert Jones in *Uprooting Anger*

“Talk is not cheap because interpretation is not cheap. The way we interpret life determines how we will respond to it (p. 15)... You and I do not respond to people or circumstances of our lives on the basis of facts. Our responses are based upon the way we interpret those facts (p. 21)... What is wrong is not just vocabulary and tone of voice, but a way of looking at life that does not agree with what God says is right and true (p. 22).” Paul Tripp in *War of Words*

Embedded Study

It is unfortunate that this step will likely not be as satisfying as we would like. We often fall into the trap of thinking that if we understand the “why” better, then the “what” will be easy, or at least easier. There are at least two realities that disrupt this seemingly sound logic.

First, sin is not rational, so it refuses to play by our rules of logic. Sin is not a simple behavior that plays by single-variable motivations. Rather sin is a condition and a predator. Sin has its roots in our fallen human nature. Sin is aided and abetted by an enemy who desires our destruction (1 Peter 5:8). This means that sin both has the home field advantage and is willing to cheat to win. This is why simple, temporary measures will never be sufficient.

Second, our goal must be effectiveness-at-change rather than ease-of-change or our best intentions will lead us back into destructive anger. Satan is always willing to wait for a more opportune time (Luke 4:13) if its interests are not best served in a given moment. The moments when we let our guard down are the times when our intelligent adversary will strike. Anything that undermines our vigilance is an asset to our adversary.

But these realities do not make an examination of the history and motives of our anger fruitless. It just means that what we intuitively want from this examination is overly optimistic. What we can gain is a better understanding of (a) what motives drive our anger, (b) the context in which those desires became excessively dominant, and (c) how those desires began to take on a god-like function in our lives.

The more honestly and accurately we are able to make these assessments in real time, the more effectively we will be at relying on God and reaching out to our support network for help. The more “foreign” or “crazy” our motives feel to us, the less likely we are to tell others what is going on. The more these things make sense to us, even if we disagree with the values behind the motives, the more willing we will be to ask for help.

Read James 4:1-3. Where does the Bible say conflict begins? It begins with desire. Simply put, we get angry because we do not get what we want. But simple does not have to be simplistic. $1+1=2$ is the foundation for even the most advanced calculus. However, simple does mean that we should be able to identify the true internal cause of our anger.

The following list and descriptions of 18 common desires is taken from *A Shelter in the Time of Storm* by Paul Tripp (page 39). Mark the ones that best fit you.

- Power.* Life has meaning or I have worth only if I have power and influence over others.
- Approval.* If I am loved and respected by _____.
- Comfort.* If I have a certain kind of pleasure or experience.
- Image.* If I have a certain look or body image.
- Control.* If I am able to have mastery over a particular area of my life.
- Dependence.* If someone is there to keep me safe.
- Independence.* If I am completely free of the obligation or responsibility to take care of someone.
- Inclusion.* If a particular social or professional group lets me into their inner ring.
- Achievement.* If I am recognized for my accomplishments.
- Prosperity.* If I have a certain level of wealth, finance, nice possessions.
- Work.* If I am highly productive and get a lot done.
- Religion.* If I am adhering to my religion’s code and accomplished in its activities.
- Irreligion.* If I am totally independent of organized religion and have a self-made morality.
- Race or culture.* If my race and culture are ascendant and recognized as superior.
- A person.* If this one person is happy to be in my life and happy with me.
- Family.* If my children/parents are happy and happy with me.
- Helping.* If people are dependent on me and need me.
- Suffering.* If I am hurting or having a problem, only then do I feel noble, worthy of love, or free of guilt.
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

You will notice that the Greek word for “desire” in verse 2 does not carry the connotation of lust, evil, or bad. That is why you can read over this list and say, “Yes, I do want those things and many of them very much,” without shame or guilt. Most often the problem is not a bad desire (that is why we feel so justified in our anger) but an overgrown good desire.

Ruling Desire: The language we will use for these good desires grown bad is “ruling desires.” There are lots of different words and phrases used to capture what we mean by “ruling desires” and each one may point us in slightly (or not so

slightly) different directions. Remember these things are not inherently bad, but good. The goal for the list below is for you to be able to hear yourself when you refer to your “ruling desires.”

expectations	felt needs	hopes	wishes
fears	beliefs	disappointments	pet peeves
what I'd like to see changed	_____	_____	_____

Desires & Closeness: Often we think of having these desires fulfilled as the key to closeness or relational happiness. However, when these legitimate desires grow into ruling desires they become the cause of our dissension, hurt, disappointment, and ultimately anger. We forget that all our relationships are with fallen human beings. Our desires may be legitimate, but those we rely on to fulfill these desires – like us – are broken (Jer. 2:13).

We begin to think that nobody cares and that we will just have to look out for ourselves. When, in reality, the problem is that either:

- nobody can consistently meet our expectations (we have a relationship trying to run on works-righteousness) or
- we are asking this desire to satisfy us like only God can (we face the reality that sin can never keep its promises).

Either way, the desire pursued in the name of closeness creates distance and we blame everything but the overgrown desire.

This is where we must learn to listen to our anger. Not recording our rants, but paying attention to what our anger reveals. Godly anger says two things (and must be right about both in order to be “godly”), while sinful anger says a third thing.

1. **“This is wrong.”** Anger is never neutral. Anger never “just is.” Anger makes a declaration. The standard for this declaration is either God’s Word and character or the desire(s) that rules my heart. *When meeting my desire becomes the measure by which I morally gauge the actions of others and begin to assign motives to their actions, then that desire has taken the role of “Lord” in my life.* That desire begins to define right and wrong, worthwhile and wasteful, friend and foe in the way only God can do and my life have peace. At times, our even legitimate desires can be so strong that they distort our moral evaluations causing us to invent offenses out of innocent actions.
2. **“It matters.”** How angry I get reveals how much I believe something matters. *I can gauge the power of a desire in my life by the reaction I have when that desire is violated or absent.* Here is where we find anger’s tendency to exaggerate and personalize offenses. It is easy (but wrong) to assume that if we are right about the wrongness of an action every subsequent emotion is valid. We also frequently assume that if the action was wrong, it was primarily or intentionally against us. Seeing that “ruling desires” are God-replacements reminds us that those who sin against us did so primarily out of an un-reliance upon God (Matt. 22:37-40). When we insist that people make things right with us before they see their offense to God, we are participating in and reinforcing their godless living.
3. **“More than you.”** Sinful anger not only reveals what we value and how much we value it, it reveals how that value compares with God and other people in our lives. This can either be a statement of great guilt or clarity. Either we will dwell in self-pity thinking we will never be able to clean up the mess we’ve made with our anger (works righteousness and self-atonement), or see sinful anger as an expression of false worship and cry out to God for His grace to restore our emotional sanity. We won’t argue or defend our way out of our values. We can only surrender them to God.

The question now becomes, “Where do desires come from? Not everyone is motivated by the same things and even the same motivation can express itself in different emotions. So how did I get my desires and why do they take me in the direction of anger?”

We start to answer this by acknowledging that the tendency to allow desires to rule our heart is a product of the Fall and our sinful nature. We sin because we’re sinners. Ultimately, there is nothing deeper than that. The core of our being is broken and in an abnormal condition.

“The Bible’s depiction of the human race is that it today is actually in an abnormal condition.... In a very real sense, the only true human beings were Adam and Eve before the fall, and Jesus. All the others are twisted, distorted, corrupted samples of humanity (p. 518)... Our view of the cause of sin will determine our view of the cure for sin, since the cure for sin will necessarily involve negating the cause (p. 616).” Millard Erickson in *Christian Theology*

So the explanations we find in our temperament, family history, and current life situation are “less deep” than our sinful heart. These factors aggravate our already chronic sinful condition. This does not mean they are unimportant. There is great value in understanding their influence upon us. It just means that they are not ultimate and we study them to create relief not find a cure. The cure is not in us, our past, or our circumstances, but in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Reflection: Select the desires that are most frequently associated with your anger. If this is difficult for you, then the journal tool provided at the end of this step will help you identify these desires. Write the top 3 desires below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Take the time to answer the questions below on paper. When you have finished share what you have written with two people who know you well and get their perspective. Both their input and your experience of being vulnerable as you share will be beneficial to the process. The information that you gather here will not be remedied at this time. But it will prepare you to be effective and comprehensive in the steps 4-7: repenting, confessing, restructuring life, and implementing.

- **Personality / Temperament:** It is important to realize that personality and temperament do not reveal “who you are” but rather “what you naturally value.” When our identity and security is found in our preferences and instincts that is a form of idolatry. However, knowing the strengths and weakness, virtues and temptations of our disposition is very valuable in loving God and loving others well.
 - What do you value more: order, influence, acceptance, or peace? When you get angry which of these are you most frequently trying to obtain?
 - Do people energize you or drain you? When you get angry, are you longing for people or pushing them away?
 - When you get angry because “people don’t understand you,” what is it they don’t understand? Do you primarily respond to life based upon “gut feeling” or intentional forethought; do you generally plan or “go with the flow”? How does that affect when, how, and at who you get angry?
 - Are you generally open to new ideas and ways of doing things? How does this influence the way you declare things “wrong” when angry?
- **Family History:** Family is where we learn how life works before we realize that we’re learning how life works. *Our home of origin becomes our “normal” even if we know it to be unhealthy.* It is “normal” because it is the only standard we know. When things are different from our “normal,” even if they are healthier, they feel awkward. We can easily interpret this awkwardness as unsafe, foreign, or otherwise wrong.
 - How was anger expressed in your family of origin? Go back to the anger survey in chapter one as you reflect on this.
 - Was there violence in your home? If so, how frequent and what types?
 - Were there traumatic events that happened in your family? Traumatic events would include: verbal, physical, or emotional abuse, destruction of home, frequent moves, seeing someone die, family member committing suicide, bankruptcy, parent having an affair, etc...
 - How did your family resolve conflict? Was one person most powerful and, therefore, always got their way? Was emotion or guilt used to coerce and manipulate? Was conflict just avoided as if it didn’t exist? Were there long debates with many counterpoints? Was it healthy?
 - How did your family talk about important or personal things (if at all)? Important things would include: faith, money, schedule, family vacations, dating, college decisions, career, etc...
 - Were family members encouraged to talk about their fears and insecurities, goals and dreams?
- **Current Life Situation:** Anger happens in real time and in real places. That is because desires attach to real things in real time. *It is impossible to consistently express healthy emotions in an imbalanced life.* God designed emotions to function within life as he designed it. We cannot change the definition of “healthy” (i.e., sleeping a minimal number of hours) and expect our emotions to adhere to God’s standards. Here again we see that overcoming anger is bigger than emotional control. It requires us to lay all of our lives before God for His evaluation and transformation. That is what it means to call Him “Lord.”
 - Do your current expectations fit within a 168 hour week? Are you trying to do more than can be done within the time God has provided? Do you have expectations of yourself and others that exceed God’s?
 - Have you examined your schedule to ensure that the most important parts of life have “first dibs” on your time? What does the things you give yourself to first reveal about the godliness of your desires?
 - How much sleep do you get per night? Are you honoring the fact that God made you a finite human being and graciously called you to rest or are you trying to be super-human?

- Do you have a budget and are you living within that budget? What do your spending habits (stingy, frivolous, or healthy) reveal about the godliness of your desires? There is a strong correlation between how people treat their money and how they treat their closest relationships (Matt. 6:21).
- What other commodities, activities, places, or relationships are frequently associated with your anger? What do these things mean to you? What do they reveal about the desires that drive you?

Anger is learned. In “Anger Part I: Understanding Anger” David Powlison unpacks two ways in which anger is learned.

- (1) Anger is learned through *modeling*. We have all seen significant people in our lives express anger in many ways.
- (2) Anger is learned through *practice*. We have all been angry and experienced it “work” and blow up in our face.

In both cases, however, the lesson is learned through the shaping of our desires. We may fear anger as dangerous and avoid it for as long as we can until we explode, or we may crave anger as powerful and give into it frequently as our “genie in the bottle” which gets us what we want. But either way anger is shaping our desires and carving its foothold in our lives.

From this reflection you should glean that desires have histories and momentum. Understanding history and momentum equips us to know what we are surrendering to God and what lies we are seeking to have proven false. However, our battle is not against our history or the momentum of our lives but against our flesh (Gal. 5:19-21, notice that over half of the “works of the flesh” are anger related).

The gospel requires a certain amount of information about ourselves (we are sinners), our situation (we cannot undo our sin or earn forgiveness), and the solution (Jesus lovingly bore the penalty for our sin). Yet the information of the Gospel does not save us from Hell or deliver us from our sin. It is surrendering to the gospel by faith that changes our lives.

Journaling Tool: For many, that last paragraph may merely sound like good Christian rhetoric. Episodes of anger are still too consuming, flash too quickly, and cause too much pain to begin to think about gospel transformation. Admittedly, to this point we have either focused on the emotion of anger in relatively abstractly concepts.

The journaling tool on the next page is designed to help you dissect current moments of anger in light of what you have been learning. This tool is meant to be used in or soon after moments of “raw” anger (large or small). You will see that the journaling tool is designed to correspond with the step work of the G4 program. But by beginning to use the journal now, you will be gathering the information you need to understand and apply those steps better when you get to them.

Additional copies of this tool can be made from the PDF found at bradhambrick.com/angerseminar.

Read Proverbs 18:14. We see that most problematic emotions (including anger) often start with legitimate hurts. The Bible has compassion for those whose “idols” emerge from legitimate, unmet desires. The Bible does not just scream, “sinner!” Consider God’s compassionate patience with Job, Abraham and Sarah during their infertility (Gen. 16-17), Moses insecurity (Exod. 3-4), the children of Israel on the trip to the Promised Land (Exod. 15:22-17), Jonah’s unwillingness to preach to an oppressor, the disciples concern about their financial sacrifice (Mark 10:13-31) or physical safety (Matt. 8:23-27), or Peter’s desire for fairness from God (John 21:15-25). In each case, God is faithful to care for the legitimate desire but also gives some form of a stern warning against allowing that desire to rule their emotions.

Read Romans 12:1-3. In this passage Paul calls on us to “think with sober judgment” about our lives (v. 3). This instruction comes as the application of the call to be “transformed by the renewal of your mind (v. 2).” One implication of this passage is that we cannot have our minds transformed by Scripture until we think “soberly” (i.e., accurately) about ourselves. The material in Step 3 was designed to help you think accurately about the key areas of life that pertain to anger. In the following steps we will look at what to do with that information to experience God’s transformation.

Accountability Focus (UNDERSTAND):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Have I spoken clearly and transparently about what I want when I am angry?
- Have I discussed the origin of my anger without using history as a form of blame-shifting?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your anger struggle to your accountability partner and commit to restraining it. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____



FROM ANGER THROUGH GRACE JOURNAL

ADMIT:

What is the situation? Summarize the who, what, when, and where of the situation.

How did I react? Summarize what you did, said, and felt in the situation.

7 Tests of Righteous Anger

___ Right Trigger ___ Right Response ___ Duration ___ Controlled ___ Motive ___ Primed ___ Effect

ACKNOWLEDGE & CONFESS:

What are the consequences? What was the personal, relational, spiritual, and emotional “fall out” of your anger for you and the other involved?

UNDERSTAND:

What are my motives? Circle or write in your “ruling desire(s).”

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| <i>Power</i> | <i>Approval</i> | <i>Comfort</i> | <i>Image</i> | <i>Control</i> | <i>Dependence</i> |
| <i>Independence</i> | <i>Inclusion</i> | <i>Achievement</i> | <i>Prosperity</i> | <i>Work</i> | <i>Religion</i> |
| <i>Irreligion</i> | <i>Race / culture</i> | <i>A person</i> | <i>Family</i> | <i>Helping</i> | <i>Suffering</i> |

Other:

What is true? What lies did you believe or truths did you distort/doubt when you were angry?

REPENT:

How can I turn to God for help? What do repentance and faith look like *now*?

RESTRUCTURE LIFE & IMPLEMENT:

How should I respond in this situation to glorify God? What would faith and obedience have looked like *then*?

What are the consequences of faith and obedience? Sanctified Imagination: How could God have used your obedience if you had responded well? Sanctified Reality: How has God used your repentance and confession for His glory and your good?

*** Adapted from David Powlison, “Three Lies About Anger & The Transforming Truth” in JBC (Winter 1996).

Step 4

“Life Would Be Better If I Were In Charge” Recognizing my need to **REPENT** to God for my anger

**“My anger is a counterfeit god mocking my Savior.
I am beginning to see how offensive my anger is to God and
how much pride I express trying to be/replace God.
I repent not merely because my anger hurts other people or disrupts my life, but
because God is superior to my anger and lovingly enables me to love Him (1 John 4:19).”**

Memorize: Acts 3:19-20 (ESV), “Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Repent” – This is the universal call of God for every person who sins. Do not hear it as a shame tactic.
- “Turn again” – If you have never surrendered your life to Christ the first time, talk to your G4 group leader.
- “Times of refreshing” – Repentance is the only way to the lasting joy and peace you seek.
- “Presence of the Lord” – God desires for you to be near to Him. You are not approaching unwelcomed.
- “Appointed for you” – Jesus Christ was sent for you to do what you’ve been trying to do on your own.

Teaching Notes

“Warmaking is a prime trait of sinners. It’s the image of Satan: liar, murderer, divider, aggressor (p. 32)... In this we become like the Devil himself (no surprise that the Devil is mentioned in James 3:15 and 4:7). We act exactly like the adversary who seeks to usurp God’s throne and who acts as the accuser of the brethren (p. 34)... But the angry person plays god, and in so doing plays the Devil, rather than letting God be God, and so embracing the Redeemer’s agenda (p. 41).” David Powlison in “Getting to the Heart of Conflict: Anger, Part 3” in *JBC* (Fall 1997).

“At the Fall, the God who is to be loved, obeyed, and served became the scapegoat for the sins of his people (p. 24)... To the degree that you have based your life on something other than the Lord, to that degree God’s love and the hope of the gospel will not comfort you (p. 98).” Paul Tripp in *War of Words*

“James’s answer for angry hearts is not ‘how-to’ but ‘Whom-to’: we must go to God himself (p. 64)... Then repent, not of the desire itself, but of the rulingness of the desire, of the way you have been letting it control your heart (p. 71).” Robert Jones in *Uprooting Anger*

“The Good News is always presented in terms of how love and anger come to be resolved. God expresses His love for His people by each of the three ways He expresses His anger at wrong... First, in love, the anger your sin deserved fell on Jesus... Second, in love, God’s anger works to disarm the power of your sin... Third, in love, God’s anger will deliver you from the pain of other’s sins (p. 41).” David Powlison in “Understanding Anger: Part 1” in *JBC* (Fall 1995).

Embedded Study

We are now turning towards the active part of the change process. The first three steps have been primarily reflective or introspective. The Gospel begins with understanding who we are and what God is saving us from. But if by “active” your thoughts drift towards “try harder to be good,” then your sincerely good intentions will (eventually) cave in on themselves like they have every time before.

Make a list of the ways you have been told or told yourself to “try harder” in your battle with anger.

- Count to 10
- Bite your tongue
- Hold your breath
- _____
- _____
- _____
- Go to your happy place
- Ask WWJD (What would Jesus do?)
- Pop your wrist with a rubber band

Pattern: When we try to solve our sinful anger or any other sin by “trying harder” we get caught in a pattern: life gets hard, we wake up to the problem, we try hard to solve it, we get tired, our effort wanes, and life gets hard again. Life goes from crisis to conviction to effort to fatigue to neglect to the next crisis. It is the proverbial “song that never ends.” There is enough fear in most crises and enough genuine conviction in the life of most Christians to start the cycle again full force. But when we’ve ridden the merry-go-round enough we grow cynical and hopeless. Even the thought of changing begins to make us angry.

This material is not another trip around the “try harder” merry-go-round!

It is at Step 4 that you begin to experience the difference. Hopefully, you have a more complete understanding of your struggle with anger than you’ve ever had before. You probably have more ongoing Christian support than you’ve had in previous attempts to control your anger. But understanding, the absence of blame-shifting, community, and direction are not the source of change. God is.

Change doesn’t involve white knuckles; it requires the empty hands and bent knees of humble repentance.

In order to see the relevance of repentance you must see your sinful anger the way that Bible does – as an offense primarily against God. We don’t view most sins this way. We see that we hurt other people with our sin and assume that God is disappointed in us for failing to love our neighbor (i.e., wife, kids, co-workers, etc...). But we do not think we have sinned against God.

Until we see this reality we will not realize that we have voluntarily unplugged from our source of love, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Further, we will try to produce these qualities in our own strength and character not realizing how futile and silly those efforts really are (John 15:4-17). We become like the person flipping switches in their breaker box during a power outage. The solution makes sense but there is still no power even when we have taken all the right steps.

Read Psalm 51:4. Let this verse soak in. After David had an affair with Bathsheba and had Uriah murdered, he says his sin is against God and God alone. David is at the step of repentance not confession. He is not saying confession is unneeded, but that it is not primary. Until David returned to the point that God is what captivated his heart (1 Sam. 13:14), then he would still be relationally dangerous no matter how contrite he might be. Until our hearts fully belong to God, we are not “safe” people. We use others for our fulfillment and peace rather than taking delight in loving them as Christ sacrificially loved us. That should humble us and clarify many of the statements other people have made that we have disregarded or considered exaggerations on their part.

Read James 4:4-5. James assesses destructive conflict as spiritual adultery (v. 4) and says it provokes God’s jealousy (v. 5). Again, if we see anger as only against another person, this seems odd. When we realize that the “ruling desires” which triggered our anger replaced God and that by our willingness to sin we declared those desires more satisfying than God, adultery is the right label and jealousy is the right response. God is not over-reacting. We are living in denial or ignorance. In order to access God’s power (transforming grace), then we must re-orient our hearts to where He is most desired. That is the only way our anger will be what it should be.

“James 4:1 and 4:12 sound two key themes that lie at the heart of conflict: grasping demands and self-exaltation. Each of us says, in effect, “My will be done, and damn you if you cross me.” To find God’s solution to conflicts, you

must ask and answer the questions, ‘What do I want?’ and ‘How am I playing God in asserting my will (p. 35)?’” David Powlison in “Getting to the Heart of Conflict: Anger, Part 3” in *JBC* (Fall 1997).

Reflection: The following questions are meant to help you see the “against God” nature of your anger so that you will be prepared to repent well. By “repenting well” we do not mean eloquently or with a certain level of emotion. *Repenting well involves having awareness of what I have declared to be more satisfying than God so that my repentance is for false worship not just bad behavior.* Take the time to right out your answers.

- How have you seen anger as your friend? How have you turned to anger in times of trouble before God? How has grumbling and preparing for an argument become a replacement for and more natural than prayer?
- What “benefits” has your anger provided (i.e., getting your way, a form of “respect,” etc.)? When you think of not being angry what do you fear being without? How have these benefits become more precious to you than the fruit of the Spirit?
- How has your “ruling desires” begun to change your concept of right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, or what is worth your time? How have you begun to organize your life around serving these ruling desires?
- How has your anger contributed to a greater focus on yourself rather than loving God and loving others?
- What people or things that God loves has your anger put in jeopardy? Where is God at work around you that your anger has competed with His agenda?

With this perspective and level of self-awareness we are ready to “repent well.” Please do not think that the quality of our repentance earns God’s forgiveness. That is the antithesis of the Gospel. However, understanding why repentance is necessary and how our sin (even against other people) is primarily offensive towards God allows us to appreciate, savor, and embrace God’s grace in a way that is limited by our ignorance or short-sightedness.

Key Element of Repentance: The great existential philosopher Yogi Berra was once asked if he wanted his pizza cut into four slices or eight. To which he replied, “Better make it four. I don’t think I could eat eight.” Here repentance is broken into six key elements. This division is arbitrary (although, hopefully, biblically faithful) and meant to further apply material that has been discussed already and prepare you for the journey ahead.

1. **A desire to live for God and submit to His Lordship.** Repentance does not begin with remorse. Remorse may have nothing to do with God at all. Repentance begins with a passionate desire to submit to God’s Lordship. It is the “falling short” of the desire to submit to God’s Lordship that sparks the genuine remorse of repentance. This life-orientation change prevents true repentance from degenerating into mere good intentions.
 - Self-Assessment: Are you surrendering to the Lordship of Christ over your emotions or are you only seeking relief from an emotion that consistently interferes with what you want from life?
2. **An understanding of how our sin sought to replace God.** It is not just actions or overgrown desires for which we repent. We repent for having replaced God with ourselves. Sinful anger does not want God to be God. Sinful anger wants to run the universe, or at least the parts that affect me. Repentance acknowledges this false worship and emotional attack upon God’s position.
 - Self-Assessment: Were you able to answer the reflection questions on the “against God” nature of your sin? What did you learn and what was hardest to acknowledge?
3. **Brokenness over the nature of our sin.** Right emotion emerges from a right understanding of ourselves, our life, and our God. The beginning of the emotional transformation of anger is not patience but brokenness. When we see and resist hiding from our own weakness, failure, and dependence, then we will interact with the weakness, failure, and dependence of others much differently (including patience).
 - Self-Assessment: Can you see yourself in those with whom you get angry, or do you view them as stupid and weak while viewing yourself as wise and strong?
4. **Expression to God.** We often forget to go to God when we have sinned against another person. It is hard to cultivate the humility necessary for “good confession” to another person when we have not taken the same offense before our Heavenly Father. We are often still the “more powerful” or “primarily wronged” party until we have been before our Holy God who promised to care for us without the need for us to sin (Phil. 4:19).
 - Self-Assessment: Do your instincts take you to God first after an episode of sinful anger? How does not repenting to God first, distort your efforts at restoring relationships through confession?

5. **Faith in God’s willingness to forgive.** More will be said about this below. Repentance is an expression of faith. We come to God with nothing to offer in exchange for our forgiveness. If we do not believe God will forgive, we will continue in our “try harder” approaches and eventually hold everyone else to the same level of effort we feel like we’re giving – forcing them into our system of self-atonement and works-righteousness.

- Self-Assessment: How do you view God (i.e., expression on His face, posture of His body, tones when He speaks, words that He says, gestures of His hands) when you come to God in repentance? This question will be very important for the material below. Take extra time to reflect on it.

6. **New direction of life usually expressed first by confession.** These themes are developed in Steps 5 and 6. For now, realize that the Hebrew word for repent is a vivid word meaning “to change direction.” Repentance is our part of entering into or recommitting to a covenant relationship (i.e., like marriage) with God. This is why sin is frequently called spiritually adultery. Repentance is our vow-renewal ceremony that expresses our renewed commitment to covenant fidelity.

- Self-Assessment: Does it startle you to think of repentance as a vow-renewal ceremony? How does that image extend the implications of repentance beyond the moment of prayer?

“Repentance in Scripture is defined as a radical change in your heart that leads to a radical change in your life (p. 177).” Paul Tripp in *War of Words*

Are You Repenting to the One True God?

The self-assessment question under the fifth key element of repentance (see above) may reveal a major impediment to repentance (or general closeness with God) that is often overlooked. Ask a dozen people what God is like and you are likely to get more than twelve answers. *Our view of God radically shapes if we repent, how we repent, what we expect from repentance, and what we do/feel after repentance.*

Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Let your imagination run with this scene. You walk into God’s throne room to repent. Jesus is coming out having served as your High Priest as you are going in. How do you see God responding to you? How does that affect whether you “draw near with confidence (v. 16)”? What do you say? Do your words reveal that you expect to “receive mercy and find grace to help (v. 16)” with your anger? Are you trying to get out of the room as quickly as you can? Are you trying to avoid eye contact? Are you bracing against God’s anger? Do you expect God to respond like you? Have you made God in your own image (or the image of one of your parents)? Stop. Look into the eyes of your Heavenly Father as you read the text again and hear His heart for you based upon intercession of your High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Who is God to you? This is not a “god of your own understanding” question. Actually, it is just the opposite. It is a question meant to invite you to get to know God for who He really is. Our perceptions, fears, and experiences do not and cannot change the character of God. But they do change if and how we come to Him.

False beliefs about God usually fall into one of two categories: (1) God is not good, or (2) God is not strong. As you mark the lies and false beliefs you have about God, indicate whether this distortion is rooted in a doubt of God’s goodness, power, or both.

- God doesn’t care about me.
- God will let me into Heaven because of Jesus but I’m on my own until then.
- God is too nice to deal with the struggles of the real world I live in.
- God let me down and is not trustworthy. I feel unprotected.
- God is spiteful and will hold my sin over my head. It is not safe to repent.
- God is irrelevant to my anger. He only helps with “spiritual” problems.
- God doesn’t understand. My situation is too complicated.
- God doesn’t want good things for me. He just wants me to act right.
- God’s anger is like my anger. Why would I turn to Him for help?
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

“God is angrier over the sin committed against you than you are (p. 128). Those harboring bitterness and hatred don’t act as if God is concerned about their plight. Out of that false belief they often take matters into their own hands to seek justice (p. 131).” Justin & Lindsey Holcomb in *Rid of My Disgrace*

Sample Prayer of Repentance

There is no magic in these words or this outline. The intent is to help you take the material from these first four steps to God in repentance for forgiveness before you take it to other people in confession (Step 5) for restoration or craft an action plan to restructure your life (Step 6).

As you pray, remember:

- God is your only source of strength to conquer sinful anger.
- God’s character is the standard for healthy, godly emotions (not meeting / pleasing other people’s expectations).
- God, and all of Heaven, rejoices when one sinner repents (Luke 15, specifically verses 7 and 10).

Take this example and use it as a conversation outline with God. As you talk with God, review through your notebook and verbalize what you have learned. Know that God is interested in what you are saying; not because you have finally “learned your lesson” but because you have come to your senses and are coming home (Luke 15:17, 20).

Heavenly Father,

I am glad I can come to you even after I’ve blown it with my anger so many times. I have been hesitant to come to You, because...

[describe your false views of God and/or repentance]

I also haven’t wanted to admit the full extent of my anger problem.

[describe what you saw about yourself in Step 1 and 2]

I can see that I have served and lived for many lesser things than You.

[list your “ruling desires” and describe how you have lived for them]

You know how those things came to be so precious to me. You know what I need (Matt. 6:8). Where my desires are good, I trust you to provide. Where my desires are bad or excessive, I ask that you would change me by whatever means necessary.

[talk about how this scares and/or confuse you]

I have replaced You in my life with my “ruling desires.” I have declared myself more capable of caring for me than You. I see how wrong and foolish that is. Please forgive me.

[talk through the six elements of repentance]

Only You do anger right. I look forward to learning more about Your character as I strive to represent You in my daily life. Lord, help me remain passionate about learning Your character and Your way so I do not return the self-centeredness of my anger.

Amen.

Accountability Focus (REPENT):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and confront contradiction between your life and words.

- Have I communicated clearly how my anger has doubted or tried to replace God?
- Does it seem to you that I am coming to God humbly trusting His willingness to forgive me?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your anger struggle to your accountability partner and commit to restraining it. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____

Step 5

“Can’t We Just Act Like This Never Happened?”

*Accepting the necessity to **CONFESS** to those affected*

**“I have not represented God well in your presence. [List]
You have been hurt by my un-God-like actions, attitudes, and beliefs. [List]
My goal in life is to make God’s character of love known.
That starts with this request for forgiveness.
I value our relationship more than my pride.
I am currently working on submitting my life to God’s control and
understand if you need time to consider my request for forgiveness.”**

Memorize: Matthew 7:1-5 (ESV), “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Measure you use” – What is the standard you use to determine if your anger is “that bad”?
- “Speck” – How do the offenses against you now compare to the offenses of your sin against God?
- “Do not notice” – Anger captures our attention, focuses on attention on some things, and distracts from others.
- “First” – This is both considering our sin first in order (confession) and importance (significance).
- “See clearly” – Until we prioritize confessing our sin, we suffer from moral vision impairment.

Teaching Notes

“One of the sure signs that we have not really understood the gospel is when we continue to be afraid of, discouraged by, and unwilling to accept our weakness (p. 130).” Paul Tripp in *War of Words*

“Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of the sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light... It is a hard struggle until sin is openly admitted. But God breaks gates of brass and bars of iron (Psalm 107:16). Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned (p. 112).” Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together*

“When god-players admit the truth, they find amazing grace in Jesus: forgiveness, mercy, sanity, a fresh start, cleansing, power, freedom (p. 37)... I’ve noticed that when people repent of sinful anger they become able to discuss their own sins accurately – after all, such sins now exist in the light of Christ’s grace and will be progressively destroyed by grace (p. 40).” David Powlison in “Getting to the Heart of Conflict: Anger, Part 3” in *JBC* (Fall 1997).

“If I can hurt another by speaking faithfully without much preparation of spirit, and without hurting myself far more than I hurt that other, then I know nothing of Calvary love.” Amy Carmichael in *If*

Embedded Study

If we became active in Step 4, then we are going public in Step 5. Confession that is less public than the sin which prompted its necessity promotes short-lived change. Confession is when our new allegiance (from self to God) becomes public. Confession is to sanctification what baptism is to salvation – public evidence that a change has occurred and is impacting the core of our identity and how we relate to the world.

Confession is often hard for someone who struggles with anger. Anger is about being strong. Confession feels weak and vulnerable. Anger is bold and in control. Confession is humble and patient. Anger intends to make certain things happen. Confession does not know what response it will get. You are being asked to buck this trend in ways that may be scary or unnatural, but that is what change is.

What fears or concerns do you have about confessing to those your anger has affected?

You will only be as free as you are honest. Privacy kills change and fuels sin. Transparency kills sin and fuels change. Chances are this step may scare you as much as any step you have taken since the first one. But remember it is not nearly as scary to move forward as it is dangerous to go backward. Don't allow fear to make you forgetful.

Read James 5:16. Notice that this command is given in the closing section of James' letter. It is a general call to every believer. Unconfessed sin is “abnormal” in the biblical depiction of the Christian life. When we experience as normal, what Scripture depicts as abnormal, we should expect significant disruptions in our life, relationships, and emotions. Confession is when we stop trying to make dysfunctional functional in our relationships.

Ken Sande in *Peacemaking for Families*, his excellent book on conflict resolution, develops seven key elements of confession (bold text below). This outline is developed in the order that words of confession would typically be spoken in conversation. Explanations and applications will be provided for each point.

1. **Address Everyone Involved.** If you ask, “Should I confess to [name]?” then the answer is probably “yes.” If someone was the object of your anger, observed your anger, or your anger indirectly negatively influenced their life you should seek their forgiveness. When you fail to seek forgiveness you leave that person believing you think your actions were acceptable to God (particularly damaging for children and those over whom you have leadership responsibilities). This process is often used by God to awaken us to the far-reaching, unintended consequences of our sin.
 - Return to the anger survey in Step 1, the merciless list you made in Step 2, and the current life situation evaluation you did in Step 3. Make a list of each name mentioned or that comes to mind.
2. **Avoid If, But, and Maybe.** Our first tendency in confession is often to soften what we admit. Words like if, but, and maybe have no place in confession. “If” calls into question whether what you did was really wrong. “But” transforms confession into accusation. “Maybe” indicates you are not convinced your actions were wrong and invites a conversation (or debate) that is likely to go badly and, regardless, is not confession.
 - Acknowledge you violated God's character. Confession is about more than inappropriate behaviors. It is an admission that I misrepresented the character of the God whose name I bear when I call myself a Christian (i.e., literally “little Christ” when the title was first given in Acts 11:26). When we seek forgiveness we are saying, “I failed in my life goal to be ‘an ambassador of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20)’ and I want clarify what I distorted.”
 - Do not use verbs of completion (i.e., I know...) but verbs ending in “-ing” (i.e., I am learning...). This is the humble disposition that protects us from the “Nobody's perfect” line of defensiveness and self-pity. Our confession acknowledges this reality through our humble verb tenses rather than manipulating this truth into a “back off” line. Avoiding verbs of completion allows the other person to talk about other aspects of our offense without it feeling like they are “piling on” to what we have already said “I know.”
 - Prepare before you confess. The moral gravity of our self-protectiveness means that we all tend to confess poorly. *A bad confession results in a second offense against the one to whom we were trying to be reconciled.* Scripted confessions are not insincere. Actually, *they reveal that we are beginning to understand the power of our words and consider their impact on others before we speak.*
 - “If there is ever a time when a believer ought to premeditate what he is going to say, it's in those circumstances when he is most likely to become angry (p. 27).” Lou Priolo in *Getting a Grip*
3. **Admit Specifically.** One goal of confession (in the name of “loving our neighbor as yourself”) is to make forgiveness as easy as possible (which is never easy). We can do this by being detailed in our confession. Generic confession is

often a sign of insincerity. “We all know what happened,” is no excuse for brevity. *Hearing that you can be specific without falling into blame-shifting or self-pity is an important indicator that you are a “safe” person and that restoration is wise.*

- If making a list of the specific ways that you have offended someone in preparation for confession causes you to feel intense shame, you need to revisit Step 4 on repentance. When shame drives confession, your emotions of contrition will take center stage and overpower your request for forgiveness.
 - It can be helpful to prepare for this by making a “web diagram” of your confession (see Figure 2). Start with your “ruling desire(s)” in the middle of a piece of paper. Out from each desire write the kind of sins you committed in service to that desire (i.e., yelling, controlling, silent treatment). Out from each kind of sin write specific events where you sinned in this way. This exercise will allow you to repent for wrong actions, idolatrous heart, and (intended or unintended) consequences of your sin.
4. **Apologize (Acknowledge the Hurt).** Sin has consequences; both intentional and unintentional. Confession expresses empathy and often takes responsibility for the dominoes that fall as a result of our sin. This is not groveling or penance. It is an exercise in other-mindedness. Resistance to expressing empathy reveals that the self-centeredness that made our sin seem rationale in the moment of sin is returning.
- Continue with your “web diagram.” Out from each specific event write a description of the kind of impact this sin had (i.e., violate trust, create fear, make it hard to be close). Out from each kind of impact write ways or occasions when you saw this impact in the other person. *If you blamed them for being unreasonable, weak, or over-reactive at those moments, you should seek their forgiveness for that as well.*
 - Remember, your goal in confession is to begin to represent God more accurately to the person you have offended. God is compassionate and understanding to our hurts (Psalm 56:8). If our confession is rooted in a desire to make God known in each moment, then our confession will include evidence that we have reflected on the impact of our sin.
5. **Accept the Consequence.** Confession is not a plea-bargain or negotiation. Confession is not a time when we establish the “acceptable terms” for our sin. It is healthier if the consequences are not punitive in nature. If our repentance and confession are sincere, then the need for consequences-as-punishment (to open blind eyes and soften a hard heart) is absent. However, consequences can still play a disciplinary role (reinforcing life lessons and solidifying prevention measures) and a trust-building role (providing tangible fruit to the otherwise unverifiable desire to change). It is acceptable, and often wise, for the forgiving person to request consequences of these latter kinds. However, *it is not your place to define what is punitive, disciplinary, or trust-building.*
- Begin by stating the obvious. If there are clear changes you need to make, state them in your confession. Do not phrase them as, “I will do [blank] for you,” as if it were a favor or concession, or “If you insist, I will [blank],” portraying change as punishment. It is more in keeping with confession to say, “Because I see my need to change, I will [blank].”
 - End by asking an open ended question. Honest questions are a sign of humility. Questions show that you think they are a person worth getting to know and someone you want to honor / protect. A simple, “Are there other ways I can show you the sincerity of my desire to change or make you feel safe?” would suffice.
6. **Alter Your Behavior.** Confession is not the culmination of the journey. It is merely the drawing of the map and acknowledgement that the map is needed. There has been a great deal of emotional energy spent to get to this point, and that is why many people stop their travels at the step of confession. But when we stop at confession our lack of effort gives the person reason to say, “You didn’t really mean what you said.”
- **Read Luke 14:28-33.** Part of embracing the gospel is counting the cost of following God and embracing the sacrifice. Obviously, it’s worth it. We give up our life of sin and its misery and we gain a life being transformed to what God intended and Heaven. But it feels painful and often we want to back out because of our doubt. The same is true with confession, because it is rooted in the gospel paradigm of dying to self and living for God’s glory through serving others. As you prepare to confess, realize this is the commitment you are making.
 - Involve others, because change happens in community. Do not let the person you sinned against be the only person who “holds you accountable.” The dual roles of forgiving and following up on commitments are nearly mutually exclusive. When people do this either the forgiver is set up to be a detective and is accused of being unforgiving, or the confessor is left without support.
7. **Ask for Forgiveness & Allow Time.** “I’m sorry” is not the same thing as asking for forgiveness. “I’m sorry” is an appropriate statement after a mistake. “Will you forgive me?” is the appropriate statement when we have sinned

against another person. Remember, forgiveness is commanded by God, but Scripture never calls on the confessing party to be the one who reminds others of this command or to insist that it be obeyed.

- Allow at least as much time as it took you to come to repentance. It is hypocritical to expect someone else to process suffering (your sin against them) faster than you changed your sin.
- During the interval between confession and granting forgiveness love and serve the other person while continuing to work on your personal change. Do not insist the other person receives love and service as you want to give it (that is self-centered, controlling, and ultimately anti-loving). Ask them how you can best create an atmosphere for them to consider your request.

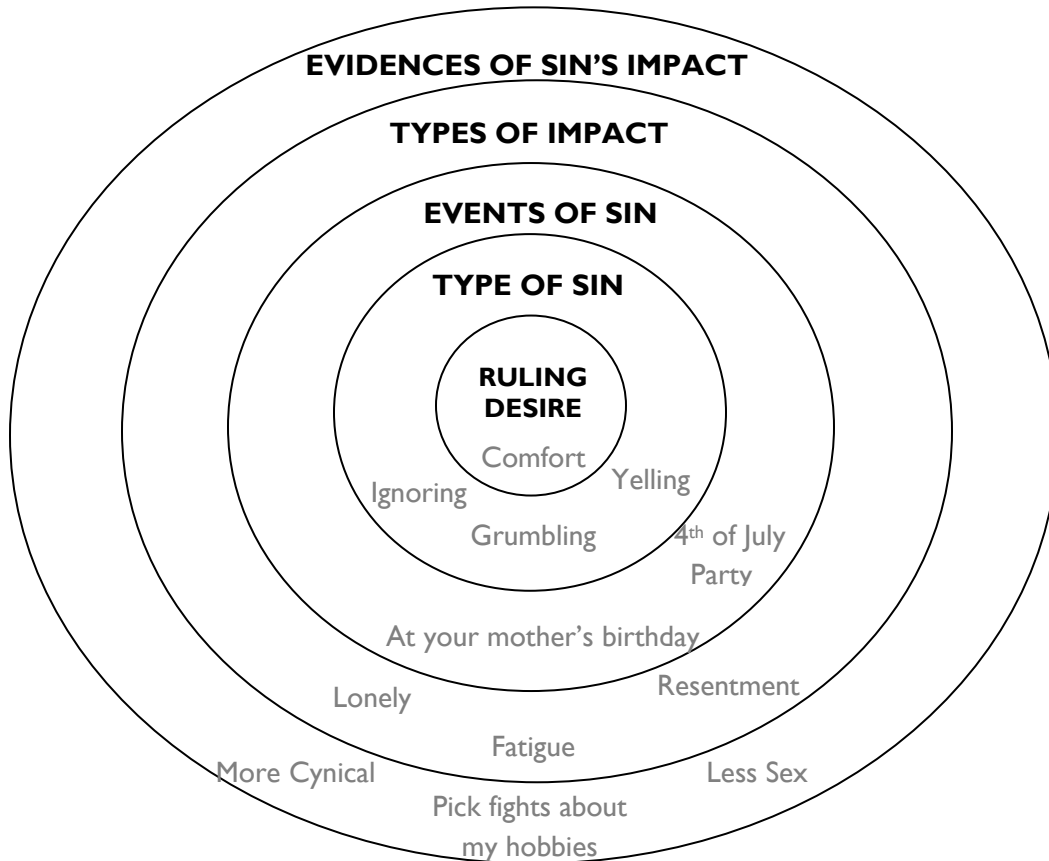


Figure 2: The Five Rings of a Web Diagram Preparing for Confession

Where do I begin? It would be easy to be overwhelmed at this point. The five point outline below should give you direction for how to complete this step.

1. Start by making the list described under “Address Everyone Involved.”
2. For each person create a “web diagram.” With each one you complete, the others should take less time.
3. Outline your confession using the tool below (PDF copies available at bradhambrick.com/angerseminar)
4. Rehearse your confession with a mentor or counselor.
5. Set a time to confess and follow through with confession.

Accountability Focus (CONFESS):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Have my rehearsals of confession been humble and receivable?
- Is there reason to believe that one of my confessions might do unnecessary harm?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your anger struggle to your accountability partner and commit to restraining it. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- _____
- _____



CONFESSION TOOL

Name of the person to whom you are confessing: _____

“I have not represented God well in your presence. You have been hurt by my un-God-like actions, attitudes, and beliefs. My goal in life is to make God’s character of love known. That starts with this request for forgiveness. I value our relationship more than my pride. I am currently working on submitting my life to God’s control and understand if you need time to consider my request for forgiveness.”

I am now willing to admit that I sinned against you by... [list specific sins and avoid words like if, but and maybe]. These actions were my choice and wrong. Compile list from rings 2 and 3 of your web diagram.

I am learning to see how much my life was ruled by the desire for [list motives for your sin]. You did not cause my sin. Compile list from the center ring of your web diagram.

I am beginning to see how my sin has affected you. [Describe] Compile list from rings 4 and 5 of your web diagram.

I know I must change to honor God and to bless those I care about. Because I see my need for change, I will [list obvious needed changes]. I am still learning what other changes honoring God will require of me. State those changes that are foundational

Are there other ways I can show you the sincerity of my desire to change or make you feel safe? [pause and take notes on their answer] This section should be blank until you speak with the person.

I understand if it will take some time but I am asking for your forgiveness for my sins against you. Thank you for showing me the honor of listening.

Step 6

“Can We Get Practical, Already?” **RESTRUCTURE LIFE** to rely on the Gospel for heart change expressed in action

**“I have learned a great deal about my self [list with examples],
 my sin [list examples], and my Savior [list with examples].
 Because of these truths I want and need to make the following changes [list].
 My temptation is to see these things as ‘what I do’ rather than
 merely cooperating with and celebrating God’s grace in my life.”**

Memorize: Ephesians 4:29-32 (ESV), “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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 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.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “No corrupting talk” – Your standard of speech is that your words should never tear others down.
- “Only... building up” – Your words should strive to cooperate with God’s activity in the life of others.
- “Grieve the Holy Spirit” – As a Christian, your words always serve as an ambassador (representative) for God.
- “Put away” – The goal is not to merely tame the tongue but remove these traits from your life.
- “Forgave you” – You undertake this effort as a forgiven, redeemed, and indwelt child of God.

Teaching Notes

“It would be impossible for a moral being to stand in the presence of perceived wrong indifferent and unmoved (p. 107).” B.B. Warfield in “The Emotional Life of Our Lord” from *The Person and Work of Christ*.

“The wise and foolish are distinguishable by how they get angry (p. 43)... Jesus did not live a calm life; He cared too much (p. 48).” David Powlison in “Understanding Anger: Part 1” in *JBC* (Fall 1995).

“Changes in location, situation, education, training, exercise, or the nature of the relationship will not solve the problem. The tongue is humanly untameable! It is a powerful, restless evil that leaves all of us confounded (p. 37).” Paul Tripp in *War of Words*

“Anger must be directed toward destroying the problem, not toward destroying the person.” Jay Adams in *What Do You Do When Anger Gets the Upper Hand?* (brochure)

Embedded Study

As we get to the most “practical” part of the study, hopefully you are at a better place spiritually, relationally, emotionally, and in terms of self-understanding than you have ever been before (or at least in a long time). This foundation allows you to enact the plans you are about to make in a way you could not when you felt distant from God, isolated from people, emotionally frazzled, and your self-understanding was filled with lies and distortions.

Describe the advantages of where you are now compared with other times you have made plans to overcome anger.

Read Psalm 127. It would be tempting to think of “restructuring life” as the first step of independence from God. Sure we needed God for the first five steps, but now He is going to “cut us loose” a little bit and we have to start to walk on our own two feet. Caution! If you approach the step of restructuring life that way, your efforts will be in vain (v. 2) and you will be walking back in the direction you came from. Remind yourself constantly that the Word of God was never meant to make you independent from the person of God or the people of God. If you find yourself longing to “do it on your own” stop and pray that God would open your eyes to the folly to which you are returning.

Running From vs. Running To: To this point, we have focused almost exclusively on what we are trying to stop rather than what we are trying to start. But we must not begin to believe that the absence of bad (sinful anger) is the same thing as the presence of good (representing God well and blessing others). Our goal must be broader than stopping sinful anger. If that were the case, then we could literally “do nothing” and please God.

Further, if our plan for replacing sinful anger is a generic form of “be nice,” then our sinful anger will always seem more realistic and practical than any of the alternatives we see. This is often why angry people are condescending. They look at the opposite of anger as simplistic naivety that could not handle their real world. If the work you do in Step 6 is not specific and does not transform what you mean by “fixes a problem,” then it will set you up to fall back into a life of sinful anger.

A good way to start is by building your vocabulary, skills, and mental categories for what the alternatives to anger are. Start with the list below and circle those attributes that you would most need to grow to overcome your struggle with anger.

teachability	bearing suffering	kindness	concern for others
contentment	gratitude	approachability	courage of honesty
sense of time	sense of process	listening well	gentleness in answers
constructive criticism	optimism	fairness	accurate interpretations
calmness	solution-focus	being attentive	maintaining honor
asking for opinions	waiting	gracious tone of voice	accepting “no”
maintain eye-contact	admit weakness	compassion	yield to others
self-denial	humility	vulnerability	receive criticism
transparency			

As you review the items that you marked as areas of needed growth (the “raw material” of your life restructuring), what stands out to you? How is this different from what you expected to work on when you began “anger management”?

The guided “how to” parts of developing your plan will be divided into three sections: (1) contentment, (2) self-control, and (3) problem solving. These headings are intentionally sequential. They move from personal to relational and from character to skill. Contentment is a prerequisite for self-control and self-control is a prerequisite for God-honoring problem solving. The better job we do at the earlier levels the easier it becomes at the latter level.

Contentment

I. Live Simply: Contentment is not complex. We often try to make contentment more complicated than it is. We also often try to force contentment into our complex lives. When we “live in the margins” of our lives (overextending our time and financial commitments) we set ourselves up for a struggle with anger.

- Review your “Current Life Situation” assessment from Step 3 and begin to make the changes necessary to live in a way that promotes peace and stability.

- **Read I Timothy 6:6-10.** How would you define “great gain”? How you define “great gain” will significantly impact your anger. “Gain” is good. Anger is a response to anything that interferes with what we deem good. The more things that we consider essential for our happiness the more we are going to struggle with anger (or fear).

2. Realistic Expectations: The battle with anger begins with our ruling desires and one of the most prevalent code words for ruling desire is “expectations.” In your anger, listen for words or thoughts that reveal expectations.

- Is it too much to ask that...?
- I just thought...
- How many times do I have to...?
- [Name], does this without a problem.
- You should...

We do not strive for contentment in a perfect world with perfect people. Contentment must withstand failure and disappointment or it’s an impractical ideal. Where you lack contentment, remember that the first and greater battle is for contentment rather than against what bothers you. It is only with contentment that you will honor God in the effort to right the wrong. In your pursuit of contentment through realistic expectations, consider doing the following:

- Review your anger journal. How has your anger been fueled by unrealistic expectations?
- Allow your anger to make you more realistic about what it means to live as a finite creature in a fallen world. Godly anger must accept that we (and others) live with limited time, money, memory, attention span, and opportunity. Anger that fights against reality is always wrong and always futile.
- Create a “**disappointment response plan.**” You may not know if a given expectation is realistic or unrealistic in the moment. How will you prevent sinful venting? How will you communicate to others that you are separating for self-evaluation; not to punish them? What will you do to gain perspective? Having a “disappointment response plan” helps you know what to do when you don’t know what to do until you can figure out what you should do.
- **Read Philemon.** Make a list of the number of violated expectations that could have caused Philemon to have been an angry, nasty letter. It may be helpful to consult a study Bible to learn the backstory. Observe how the gospel and an understanding of progressive sanctification (the belief that people mature over time) guided the emotions, relationships, and expectations of each person within this letter.

3. Keep No Record of Wrongs: Contentment doesn’t have a scoreboard. To the degree that you keep score, you will not be content. When the conversations within your anger are repetitive, this is a strong indicator that you are keeping a record of wrongs and that this record is amplifying your anger.

- Make a list of the wrongs against you that you are currently in bondage to through bitterness. Forgive those that do not require relational restoration or for which it is impossible to gain relational restoration (i.e., offender died).
- If a wrong from your list needs to be addressed, resolve to introduce that conversation in a moment of calmness. Before God, forgive the offense prior to addressing it with the individual. Once the matter has been addressed, even if they will not admit their wrong, the Bible calls you to resist becoming their emotional slave (I Cor. 7:15b) by trusting God’s judgment rather than continually trying them in the court of your mind (Rom. 12:9-21)
- Your list has now been transformed from a “wrongs against me” list to a “danger zone thinking” list. It is now your responsibility to resist dwelling upon these events. During times of struggle it is good to reflect on the power and significance of Jesus’ death on the Cross and then think about another subject.

4. Limit Interaction with Angry & Discontented People: We are all good at justifying our sin. Angry people are powerful and convincing communicators. Anger almost always sounds like the logical response when you listen to angry person. For this reason, as you seek contentment you should limit your interaction with people who are not taking responsibility for and actively working on their anger. If not, you will continue to learn the language of dissatisfaction and blame-shifting. Your anger “won’t seem *that* bad.”

- **Read Proverbs 22:24-25 and I Corinthians 15:33.** Proverbs is clear about what to do, “make no friendship (v. 24)” and why to do it, “lest you learn his ways (v. 25).” The same principle is repeated in the New Testament. The question becomes, “Do you believe you are the exception to the timeless truth of God’s Word?” Your willingness to follow God away from those content to live in their sin should be a point of conviction for them (Heb. 11:7) and an opportunity for them to follow your example of repentance (I Cor. 11:1).
- Make a list of relationships that you need to begin weeding from your life. Remember, you are not condemning them for their anger. But you are saying their unwillingness to acknowledge their anger makes it unwise for you to

spend time with them. It's the equivalent of an alcoholic not hanging out at a bar. You are choosing a different way of life. Major life change comes with significant relational changes.

5. Live Beyond the Moment: Contentment realizes there is more to life than the here and now. Anger wants what it wants now. Sinful anger rarely continues to make sense when we think about what we want out of life rather than what we want out of the moment. Culturally, we have begun to measure life in smaller units (days, hours, minutes, and seconds) rather than larger units of time (months, years, decades, and generations). This accounts, in part, for our rise in anger.

- Create a time line of your life. For the years that you have already lived write what you thought would make you happy (ruling desire) during that season of life. For the seasons of life ahead and your legacy after your death, write what you think will truly matter. Put this somewhere you will see it daily. After you write new anger journals, review this time line to further correct your perspective.
- Start the spiritual discipline of fasting and fast from something related to one of your ruling desires. Take your discontentment to the One who can change things through prayer and focus your discontentment on His kingdom, not yours.
- **Read Philippians 2:14-18.** Notice that Paul is addressing the subject of grumbling (a form of anger). His solution is to point the reader to the “day of Christ” and striving not to “labor in vain (v. 16).” It was this “living beyond the moment” mentality that allowed him to hold his emotions in check even in the face of injustice (Phil. 1:12-18).

Self-Control

6. Slow Down: Anger is a rushed emotion. Methodical anger is almost a contradiction in terms (or much more evil). When we see injustice it rattles us and speeds us up. We begin to feel like we are on a “just cause.” Grandma was right, “Haste makes waste.” This quickening pace triggers a physiological hazard to anger, because it triggers the adrenal system and adrenaline serves as a microphone to the emotions. A slow pace is an expression of faith in God as it reveals that we do not believe this entire moment is resting on our words and actions.

- **Read Proverbs 12:13, 15, 18, 20.** Notice that verse 18 differentiates the wise from the fool based upon the pace of their speech. Think of wise people you admire. Do they tend to speak fast and first or slow and last? What are the advantages of waiting to speak and measuring your words? Reflect on these advantages until they are at least as compelling as your ruling desires.
- **Review James 1:19-21.** This is the memory passage from Step 1. Notice the double emphasis on the word “slow” in the discussion of anger.
- Sit down (if possible) when you are angry. Getting into a body posture that promotes discussion over action aids self-control. Sitting lessens the likelihood that your physical presence will be intimidating (a form of other-mindedness). Sitting also restricts large muscle movements that can be an additional trigger to the adrenal system.
- When you can tell you are getting angry take several long, deep breaths (this also helps limit the activation of the adrenal system). Recall the passages of Scripture you have memorized in this study. Repeat them to yourself slowly to help with your pace of thinking. Use them to trigger the major themes of this study. End by telling yourself, “I will express faith in God by going slow.”

7. Represent Others Accurately: When angry, a primary way we can love others is to fairly represent what they say both in tone and content. This is the beginning of honor in conflict. Anger often makes a mess of our ears before it makes a mess with our mouth. When we misrepresent (i.e., hijack) the words of others, we dismantle the very foundation of communication. *Misrepresentation is a form of lying* in that it creates an artificial reality concerning what was said and tries to force another person to live in the world we created.

- Give the benefit of the doubt. When we refuse to give the benefit of the doubt we label the other person an “enemy combatant” and begin to use the communicative war strategies that such an enemy would merit. **Read Matthew 5:43-48.** This application may create hesitancy. But remember we are called to love our enemies. After all, *when we are angry, everyone feels like our enemy, so if we don't love our enemies we would love no one but ourselves.*
- Restate with humility. This is another form of “slowing down” but one that protects interpretation. Restating applies to both what the other person says and what you say when the other person does not understand (having to “repeat myself” is often an anger trigger rooted in pride). **Read I Corinthians 1:14-17.** Notice that as Paul dealt with a tense issue, even under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (I believe as an example to us), he was

humble as he restated and clarified his remarks. Do not allow the pride and rushed-ness of anger to coerce you into building off a bad foundation of understanding.

- Don't confuse understanding with agreeing. People often fear that if they fairly represent another person in a disagreement, this will be mistaken for agreement with what they've said. This is the product of bad communication. Realize that as you consistently “represent others accurately” even when you disagree with them, you are not just helping to resolve this conflict but also purifying the atmosphere for future conflicts.

8. Weigh Your Words: Thinking about how to best say what should be said is not a form of “insincerity.” Sinful anger is not a personality type that is “just who I am.” The fruit of the Spirit of kindness and gentleness are available to every believer without exception. When you weigh your words you are loving God by accurately representing these fruits of His character. You are also loving the other person by communicating that, “I value our relationship more than my emotional release or the ruling desires that are driving me right now.”

- **Read Matthew 12:36-37.** These are scary words. God will not accept the excuse, “You know I didn't mean it” because He knows our hearts (Psalm 7:9) and that our words reveal our hearts (Matt. 12:33-35).
- Take a deep breath before you speak. Consider what God is doing in this moment to refine the character of each person involved (including you). Then speak as one desiring to cooperate with God's agenda for this interaction.

Problem Solving

It is easy for problem solving to become the point of distraction that undermines the progress that has been made. The assumption becomes, “If I do everything right, then the problems (situational and relational) will go away.” When that assumption proves false, we can get discouraged (read – should enact our “disappointment response plan”), and think, “What was the point in doing all this work on my anger?”

The subject of problem solving or conflict resolution is a seminar unto itself, so the comments here will not be comprehensive. If this is an area that you desire greater skill development, consider *Peacemaking for Families* by Ken Sande.

The “life restructuring” under this heading are least novel. Honestly, they come across a bit cliché and self-help-esque. The two things you should remember as you study this section are: (1) skill development is the easiest part of overcoming anger; and (2) without dying to self and living for God these problem solving skills will degenerate into mantras, manipulation, or law standards with which you attack other people.

9. “I” Statements, Not “You” Statements: This is nothing more than humility, the benefit of the doubt, and Matthew 7:3-5 in action. Consider the difference between the statement, “You are never at home,” and “I want to spend more time with you.” Both deal with the same subject. One is likely to resolve conflict. The other is likely to erupt it. Do not become an awkward slave to the rule, but notice how you can embed accusation into what you perceived as “innocent statements.”

- Review your anger journals and recall ways in which you enflamed the conflict with “you statements.” Make a list of the kinds of things you said. Then reword each to an “I statement” while mentally picturing yourself in those moments. This might be a good time for another round of confession.

10. Choose Time and Place Wisely: This is the interpersonal expression to slowing down and having realistic expectations. It reveals that you are beginning to happen to your anger instead of your anger happening to you (which was true all along).

- Pre-set safe places to address problems with people with whom you regularly have to solve problems. Even in spontaneous conflict the request to return to a place (i.e., kitchen table, sofa, conference room) identified during a time of calmness gives reason for hope.
- Establish safe ways to address problems with people with whom you regularly have to solve problems. The infamous, “we need to talk” introduction coming out of the blue is generally not safe. Having regular times of voluntary evaluation allows us to invite conversation rather than waiting until it builds up and is “brought to our attention.” With a spouse or child, maintaining physical touch (i.e., holding hands, touching shoulder or leg) during the conversation establishes a safe atmosphere for conversation.

11. Attack the Problem Not the Person: One indicator of sinful anger is enemy confusion. Sinful anger creates rapid, confusing, and difficult role re-definition. Throughout the course of a day or week, how many times does your anger change

someone’s role from friend to foe and back again? They don’t know who they are until your emotions tell them. In godly anger, we protect others from this confusion and fearful interpreting of our mood by keeping them in the “friendly role” even when we are angry.

- Be very aware of when you exaggerate. Words like always, never, only, every time, and a million times often portray the other person as an idiot, lazy, or heartless.
- State the problem clearly in the beginning of the conversation and be leery of trying to solve multiple problems in one conversation. If there is not a problem that can be clearly stated or corrected and you still struggle with anger, review the material under contentment.

12. Constructive Displeasure of Mercy: This phrase for godly anger lived out in the face of a problem is borrowed from David Powlison. It summarizes much of what we have studied up to this point. Use this phrase to crystallize the new mental picture for anger you have been developing in this study.

- a. *Displeasure* – Problem solving begins with acknowledging there is a problem. Godly anger is not a spiritual euphemism for denial. Bad things happen. People sin against us. These things call for a negative emotional response. We cannot believe in real goodness and truth while living in a fallen world and only experience pleasant emotions.
- b. *Constructive* – Unless our anger is constructive it only contributes to the wrongness to which we are reacting. This creates an endless cycle of ever-increasing anger. We get sucked into the cycle and feel ever more justified in our anger. Anger is only godly when it works against the system of brokenness that triggered it.
- c. *Mercy* – Anger is fueled by giving others their “just deserves.” That is the essence of the wrath of God. The only thing that prevents anger from being an eternal disposition (literally, Hell) is mercy. There is no way you will be released from a life-dominating struggle with anger and insist on justice. At some point, in every situation of wrong, your choice will be between justice with continued anger and mercy with peace.

Read Matthew 21:12-14. Let this passage be a picture of the constructive displeasure of mercy. Notice that Jesus expressed displeasure at real wrongs in demonstrable ways. Notice also what happened immediately afterwards, “the blind and the lame came to him (v. 14).” *The anger of God did not cause those who were weakest and most vulnerable to shy away from Him; rather Jesus’ anger was safe enough to draw them to him.* Think of the episodes of anger in your life that you have justified with this passage. Did those episodes draw anyone towards you? Hopefully you can think of examples where your anger did that. Think through what was different about your expression and experience of anger in those Christ-like instances.

Conclusion: Review the notes you have made while studying this chapter. Link and rank the top 10 changes that you need to begin making in the chart below. As you make this “life restructuring” plan, also consider prerequisites for each change (i.e., to “live simply” you may have to allow certain commitments to expire) and people who will be involved or affected by these changes. A PDF version of this document can be found at bradhambrick.com/angerseminar

Accountability Focus (RESTRUCTURE LIFE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Are there important changes I have resisted making?
- Is the order of my planned changes based upon good priorities and a wise progression?



LIFE RESTRUCTURING PLAN

Priority	Specific Change	Prerequisites for Implementation	People Involved of Affected
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

Step 7

“How Was I Supposed to Prepare for This?”

*Gaining the flexibility and humility necessary
to **IMPLEMENT** my plan*

“Plans are easier than life. They exist outside my sinful heart and broken world. Trying to live out my plan has taught me more about my self, my sin, and my Savior.

As I have had victory, the old expressions of sin have taken new forms.

I have had to remember that my plans are merely how I intend to rely on God and not, themselves, my deliverer.

Here are the unexpected challenges I faced [list], how I failed [list], where I succeeded [list], what I learned [list], and how God was faithful [list].

I now see that [list] is really the most important part of my plan.”

Memorize: Luke 6:27-31 (ESV), “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “You who hear” – These are hard words and difficult teachings. Will you hear them or return to anger?
- “Love your enemies” – Through the lens of anger, everyone becomes an enemy. Will you love?
- “Curse... strike... take” – Godly anger will always be expressed in the context of real evil.
- “Give” – Godly anger will cost you. You probably began this study for your relief. Will you continue?
- “As you wish... do so” – Again we see that the skill level expression of overcoming anger is not complex.

Teaching Notes

“Patience is the evidence of an inner strength. Impatient people are weak, and therefore dependent on external supports—like schedules that go just right and circumstances that support their fragile hearts (p. 173).” John Piper in *Future Grace*

“Self-control is the ability to consistently make wise decisions and fulfill responsibilities on the basis of God’s Word rather than on the basis of one’s feelings (p. 51).” Lou Priolo in *Getting a Grip*

“Godly anger does not need to ‘win...’ Its purposes are more modest on the surface, but more extravagant under the surface: the glory of God and the eternal well-being of God’s people (p. 53).” David Powlison in “Understanding Anger: Part I” in *JBC* (Fall 1995).

“Here [on earth] walked the Lord of glory with His own creatures. Every human being that Jesus met owed Him life and utter loyalty. He is YHWH, to whom temple sacrifices were offered in repentance and gratitude. Yet most of these people ignored Jesus, misunderstood Him, tried to use Him, reviled Him, plotted against Him (p. 38)... Jesus dealt gently with the ignorant and misguided, even when He suffered at their hands (p. 39).” David Powlison in “Getting to the Heart of Conflict: Anger, Part 3” in *JBC* (Fall 1997).

Embedded Study

We are now squarely in the present tense. Admitting, acknowledging, understanding, repenting, and confessing were all focused on things we had done or experienced (past tense). Restructuring life was all about what we intend to do (future tense). In the first six steps we were protected from dynamic things like the pressures and nuances of daily life. To this point, we have scripted and rehearsed our social interactions but now we are leaving the scripts behind.

In order to engage with implementation effectively, we must have our perspective on temptation transformed. There is a tendency to view temptation as failure. If our plan is merely to avoid or prevent temptation (irritating situations), then we will fail and think, “What’s the use?”

Read I Corinthians 10:9-14. Paul is making application to anger (grumbling in v. 10). He cautions against thinking that our plans are full-proof enough to eliminate temptation (v. 11). Then he reminds us of God’s faithfulness to provide “a way of escape” in every temptation, but he says this way of escape will allow us “to endure it (v. 13).” Paul knows that temptation will not be removed because it is rooted in “idolatry (v. 14)” not behavior. The ruling desires that push us towards sinful anger will not be stripped from our soul, because most of them are good. Rather “implementing” our plan will consist of submitting those desires to the Lordship of Christ in the myriad of life situations we find ourselves in daily.

It is for this reason that we can say, temptation is an opportunity to experience the power of God’s grace and delight in the satisfaction of God’s presence by loving others well *in the midst of adversity*. With this we do not look forward to or pursue temptation, but we do enter temptation with the confidence that we can celebrate our love for God in meaningful ways that blesses those we love in the midst of temptation.

Detecting Non-Events: One of the challenges of maintaining progress in overcoming anger is that anger done poorly is more obvious than self-controlled problem solving. When our sin is more obvious than our faithfulness it can be very discouraging. When we do things better we never know how bad it would or could have been. We don’t know how much relief to feel or how much victory to celebrate. We may only feel guilt or condemned that “better” still wasn’t “good.”

Read Hebrews 10:10-14. The seemingly conflicted verb tenses of verse 14 capture one of the great tensions of the Christian life and why it is hard to know how encouraged to be in a given moment of incomplete growth. It says Christ “*has perfected* for all time” those who “*are being sanctified*.” Both verbs talk about our spiritual maturity; in the case of this study our ability to express godly anger. The first verb carries the tense of a “past completed action with ongoing consequences.” The second verb carries the tense of “action currently being carried out.” This tension defines where every Christian lives.

To help you make sense of what growth looks like practically, imagine a sound wave (see Figure 3 below). A sound wave can be measured three ways: intensity (height: A to B), duration (width: Y to Z), and frequency (peak to peak: 1 to 2). Our anger can be measured in the same three categories. This now gives you three ways that you can begin to measure progress with your anger. Is your anger less intense? Does your anger last for briefer periods of time? Is your anger less frequent? Your anger journals and personal reflections should provide a fairly objective basis of comparison.



Figure 3: Anger and Sound Wave Comparison

To provide some encouragement consider the following “life disruption score” (LDS). LDS is an arbitrary statistic, but it highlights a valid point. Let’s assume that the intensity, duration, and frequency of anger were maxed out on a 1 to 10 scale. That would create a LDS score of 1,000.

$$10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$$

Now let’s assume that this individual is able to improve their self-control and character on each variable only by two increments. How much do you think that would improve their LDS score?

$$8 \times 8 \times 8 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

Are you surprised at what a small amount of humility, self-control, and other-mindedness can do? It is not just a math trick. It is the grace of God. If our sanctification (spiritual, relational, and emotional maturity) required effort that matched the seriousness of our sin, that would be self-atonement. What spiritual growth requires is dying to self and wisely living for God’s glory by loving others well. When that starts, the momentum of all Heaven is at our back. We begin to move like we’re on the escalator walking tracks at an airport. Each step of faith is caught up in the current of God’s grace.

The goal in “implementing” is to review how well your life restricting plan is working in each area of your life. To do this, we will look at who, what, when, and where questions. The how question should have been largely answered in Step 6 and the why question was answered in Step 3. You may find significant overlap between these questions.

For example, you might answer: Who? Family. When? Evening. Fatigued. Where? Home. What? Transition to being “off duty.” This overlap will allow you examine whether your current plan for dealing with anger actually addresses the component that makes your temptation most severe. In this example it might be that this person’s schedule is unrealistic making fatigue excessive. Or it might be that being “off duty” has become a sense of entitlement and perceived cure all for the stress of life (i.e., idolatry). In the first possibility taking more personal time would be an excellent plan. In the latter, it would only exacerbate the problem unless repentance occurred and values changed.

As you go through this evaluation you are looking to take encouragement from 10’s becoming 8’s. You are also looking to refine and expand your plan so that your 8’s are practically longing to become “Christ’s.” The goal is not numbers (i.e., saying fewer curse words or days without an “episode”), but Christ-likeness. The purpose of giving a numerical metaphor is to help you find encouragement in the midst of the struggle.

Plan Evaluation Form: The chart below is meant to guide you through an evaluation of how well you are implementing your plan. Expect this to be a time of clarification, prioritization, and modification to your life restructuring. The chart is designed expecting that you have made progress. Praise God for each improvement you are able to list. This will help you remain humble. If there are blanks (meaning no or minimal improvement) in your chart, those are the areas you need to modify in your plan. A PDF copy of this document can be found at bradhambrick.com/angerseminar.

Read Luke 4:1-15. “Until an opportune time (v. 13)” could be the theme phrase of this evaluation. In the midst of taking encouragement, you are also exploring your life to determine where you are most vulnerable for attack. You recognize that sin is no more passive than love. God has pursued you and brought you to a point where this study interests you (or else you would not have persevered to this point – be encouraged). But Satan also pursues you for your destruction (1 Peter 5:6-11). Satan would like nothing more than to see your progress crumble, not only to disrupt your life but also to cause you (and those you love) to doubt God and His Word. Take Step 7 as seriously as any of the first six.

As you read through these categories of evaluation, do not think you have to create a unique plan for every contingency. That would be impossible and create a different bondage: legalism. The goal is to bring greater awareness to the variety of circumstances that you will need to apply the plan you started developing in the previous step.

Who? Implementation Evaluation

Person

Christ is as personal as our struggles. Being Christ’s ambassador, therefore, may call us to something different in each relationship. As you examine each person with whom you are working on your anger, ask yourself, “What would it look like to represent Christ to this person?”

Read the 7 “I am” statements of Jesus in the book of John. Examine Jesus’ audience, their need, the type of relationship, His cost, and their response. How should your plan to overcome anger with each person on your list push you to become more like Christ? How is that a more satisfying and enduring motivation than “to be nicer”?

- “I am the Bread of Life (John 6:22-59).”
- “I am the Light of the World (John 8:12-30).”
- “I am the Gate for the Sheep (John 10:1-21).”
- “I am the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21).”
- “I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:17-27).”
- “I am the Way, the Truth, & the Life (John 14:1-14).”
- “I am the True Vine (John 15:1-17).”



LIFE RESTRUCTURING IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

	Improvement in Intensity	Improvement in Duration	Improvement in Frequency	Needed Changes to Plan
WHO?				
Person 1				
Person 2				
Person 3				
Person 4				
Person 5				
Group 1				
Group 2				
Group 3				
Role 1				
Role 2				
Role 3				
WHEN?				
Time 1				
Time 2				
Time 3				
Time 4				
Time 5				
Energy Level				
Before/After				
Other				
Other				
WHERE?				
Home				
Work				
Activity 1				
Activity 2				
Activity 3				
Other				
WHAT?				
Event 1				
Event 2				
Event 3				
Transition 1				
Transition 2				
Substance 1				
Substance 2				
Other				

Group

It is unfortunately common for us to be different people in public than private. How does your anger and self-control vary in the different groups in which you find yourself? Typically being in public constrains our anger; proving the power of the fear of man (i.e., Luke 20:19-26) and our ability to demonstrate self-control when it's to our advantage. Do certain groups condone or encourage your anger? Should you be more transparent with certain groups to let them know you are targeting anger an area of personal growth?

Read Hebrews 3:12-19. Notice this is a “one another” verse. That implies a group. Scripture calls us to use the effects of community to our advantage, not just to highlight our hypocrisy (i.e., “you stop yelling when you answer the phone”) or inconsistency (i.e., “you don't talk this way to anyone else”). If you do not allow community to play the role God intended, then it will fulfill the functions Satan desires (shame and hypocrisy).

Role

We respond to certain roles with fear or pride (both of which feed anger). Some men are baffled at the thought of being a “father.” Some women fear failing as a “wife.” Place a middle school student in the role of “captain” and you'll often see a personality transformation. How do you respond to the various life roles in which God has placed you? How have certain roles tempted you to act differently in unnecessary or unhealthy ways?

Read I Timothy 3:1-13. Notice that the qualifications for church leadership (life roles) are primarily rooted in character (most of which we have discussed already in this study) and not expected to change once additional responsibilities are received. A caution is given about promoting a young convert too early (v. 6), because of the recognition that premature role changes often negatively influence character.

When? Implementation Evaluation**Time**

The morning rush. That 2:30 feeling. When you're low on food. Bed time. Each of these times present unique challenges to self-control. These challenges can be logistical (three people using one bathroom), biological (fatigue or low blood sugar), relational (jealous of other's freedoms), or of many other natures. How well is your plan addressing the specific times when you struggle with anger? What is the typical nature of the struggle you face at each of these times?

Read I Thessalonians 5:14-22. Notice that in verse 14 Paul prescribes different responses to different kinds of struggles: admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak. Are you assuming that all your anger is rooted in the same type of struggle? If you find areas where your plans are ineffective (even though they are effective in other areas), examine whether the nature of the struggle is different in the areas that are resistant to change.

Energy Level

No, God does not “understand” our sin when we're tired, if by “understand” we mean “give us a pass.” Sometimes, however, we think of anger as just a problem when we are fatigued, but it can also be a struggle when you are particularly “up.” Being excited about something can make the fall of a lesser disappointment seem much more severe than it is. Look at the areas where your plan has stagnated or failed. Are there themes in your energy level at those times? How does striving for self-control despite your energy level increase your selflessness?

Read Matthew 11:25-30. Do you view fatigue as an invitation to rely on God more or a call to “suck it up”? If you view fluctuations in your energy level as times of necessary independence, you magnify energy changes by separation from God's love and strength. How can you intentionally draw nearer to God when your energy level changes?

Before / After

Both success and failure can be contexts for increased temptation; as can dread and relief or gearing up and winding down. Review your anger journals and try to recall what was going on just before or after these occasions. Before-after temptations can be particularly difficult because (by definition) your attention is on something else.

Read Luke 22:54-62. This scene happens right “after” Jesus was arrested and just “before” His trial. We can safely assume that the last thing on Peter's mind was his character and this is precisely when Peter goes into a public, cursing fit on a stranger (Mark 14:71). It was then he saw Jesus' eyes and woke up to what he was doing. How can your plan be tailored to keep self-control on your mind when your attention is focused on what's concluding or coming?

Where? Implementation Evaluation

Home

Anger is often a cowardly emotion. It shows itself most where it believes itself to be most safe. It manipulates the commitment of others to become a license of free expression. If your anger is more prevalent at home than elsewhere you need to hear these highly uncomfortable words. Those you love most should not be those you protect the least. Admittedly, home is a place where you have to deal with more subjects, see more of one another's sin and weaknesses, and share every possession. This is hard (understatement). But this is why the Gospel must penetrate the way we think about our home-life more than any other arena of life.

Read Ephesians 6:4. Paul recognized that dealing with the “mess” of home would be a particularly tempting time to succumb to sinful anger. Our ruling desires tend to be strongest when we are with those we love most. Consider the following quote on marriage to help you think through the advantages to making home the priority place for overcoming anger rather than the “exception” that should be understood.

“Marriage provides the small experimental laboratory whereby we can learn to engage in spiritual fellowship. Everything that happens broadly in social contexts has a mirror in marriage – disagreements, wounding words, conflict of interests, and competing dreams (p. 162).” Gary Thomas in *Sacred Marriage*

Work

Work is another place (in addition to home) where we are prone to find our identity outside of Christ. When something becomes “who we are” and it is disrupted, it feels more important than loving God and loving others. Has your job become a source of identity, discouragement, or grumbling? Does the nature of your work lead to a sense of entitlement or condescending attitude? How might these attitudes feed into your struggle with anger? How should your plan be updated for these variables?

Read Colossians 3:22-25. Working “heartily, as for the Lord” is the remedy for both work-based discouragement and pride / identity. It reminds you that you are never more or less than a child of God living for God's glory. Neither having a large domain of influence nor working in a setting of suffering changes this.

Activity

Hobbies and other significant activities can be places or subjects of anger. We can begin to defend our “rights” to this time. We can be offended that people don't care about what is important to us. The passion we feel about our activity can easily convert into anger. These are not anti-activity statements, but activity-awareness warnings. If anger is rooted in ruling desires, then the activities we enjoy will likely be temptation centers.

Read I Corinthians 9. Notice that Paul begins by asserting his freedom, but then voluntarily sets it down in order to protect unity. Paul did not always make this sacrifice, but when his “rights” would interfere with the ability to effectively love others well, he placed his “rights” second. What activities tend to be a magnet for your anger? Is it your passion for the activity, the people associated with the activity, the time or financial cost, or something else that exacerbates the anger? What changes in your life restructuring would be needed to show that this activity was not more important to you than a godly character?

What? Implementation Evaluation

Event

Christmas. Vacation. Family Reunion. Anniversary (good or bad events). Events often carry a powerful emotional charge. An average problem on a special day will likely elicit an above average response. Events also often take us away from the safety of our routine. They involve special people, places, or schedules. We can feel like we are making decisions without the necessary frame of reference (and we tend to blame the person who raised the question). What special occasions have triggered your anger? What about those events made it harder to express self-control? How well do you form “realistic expectations” for things outside your routine?

Read John 2:1-12. Jesus is at an event: a wedding. He is faced with an unexpected request. You might think the miracle is that Jesus didn't get angry. Beyond not getting angry, he enjoyed an extended visit with his family afterwards (v. 12). In this,

we see Jesus experiencing temptation like ours (Heb. 4:15). These are the moments when, “honor your father and mother” are relevant... and difficult. Place yourself in Jesus’ position. How would you have responded to being “outed,” presumed upon, and pressured? After letting your imagination run, read Jesus response again.

Transition

Consider the material under the above sections on roles, activities, or events. Not only do we have to do these things, but we have to transition from one to the next continuously. Worse yet, there are times when multiple roles or activities are relevant, but they call for different responses. We feel torn and it makes us angry. We lash out at people because life is complicated and sometimes conflicted. What are the hardest transitions you have to make? What is unique about those transitions that make them harder than others?

Read Luke 22:24-30. This is near the end of Jesus’ ministry and Jesus is openly talking about His death. The disciples are about to become the apostles. It is at this time that they get into a heated argument filled with self-centeredness. Jesus reminded them of their identity that transcended any role transition—servant. What are the permanent facets of your identity that should serve to keep your emotions grounded even in the midst of significant transitions?

Substance

There are obvious substances that will affect emotional control – alcohol, steroids, prescription medicines, and illegal drugs. If you are using any of these (prescription meds for non-medical purposes), while working on your anger, you should quit immediately. Emotional control and mood altering drugs are mutually exclusive. This is true without the complicating factors of deceit, hiding, defensiveness, forgetfulness, irresponsibility, and life disruption that often accompany these substances. You may also want to examine whether anger episodes correlate with high amounts of caffeine or sugar.

Read Proverbs 20:1-7. The correlation of substance abuse and anger is not a new observation. We often think we are the exception to timeless realities. If substance abuse is a significant part of your anger struggle, please read “Where Do I Begin?” in the introduction to this book and know that substance abuse needs to become the focal point of your efforts to honor God. Overcoming anger will not last where substance abuse is present. A comparable resource to this one, tailored to addiction, can be found at bradhambrick.com/addiction.

Conclusion

Use reflections from this chapter (and new anger journal entries) as opportunities to update your life restructuring plan. Remember that Satan will not rest, so no plan is ever finished. There is no such thing as a “final draft” to this plan. That is not a statement of defeat, but what it means to plan within the grace of God. Our plans are not our hope, because we are not trying to earn God’s acceptance. We are God’s children who long to be more like our Father. Our plans should be the tireless strivings of children who “idolize” their Father. Good plans, then, are the fruit of worship and delight in God’s character.

Make sure your planning and implementation maintain the identity and disposition of Ephesians 5:1-2.

“Therefore, be imitators of God, *as beloved children*. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Accountability Focus (IMPLEMENTATION):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Have my commitment to change remained steady and focused?
- Is there an area of my life that I am avoiding changing my patterns of anger?

Step 8

“This Is Harder and Longer Than I Thought”

*Recognizing that change requires **PERSEVERING** over a lifetime*

**“I can see God’s faithfulness over the last [time since beginning this material].
As I have experienced victory, my temptation has changed [describe]
and my ability to focus on God in non-crisis times has been stretched [examples].
I have come to realize that ‘healthy’ means more than the absence of sinful anger.
God has an entirely different agenda for my life [explain] than what I knew.
I am learning to enjoy it and be comfortable in it.”**

Memorize: 2 Timothy 2:24-25 (ESV), “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “The Lord’s servant” – Is this becoming the predominant identity clause that orients your life?
- “Must” – This list of attributes is to define those who call themselves servants of God.
- “Opponents” – The application point of this verse is primarily your response to those who oppose you.
- “God may” – These responses are possible when we recognize that only God changes people.
- “Repentance” – Hopefully you now view this as a good word that would be a blessing to yourself and others.

Teaching Notes

“True strength in God’s eyes means victory over one’s temper more than one’s enemies (p. 85).” Robert Jones in *Uprooting Anger*

“The Bible links hope in God with a willingness to wait. To wait is to have confidence that God will bring justice. He will satisfy the depth of our desire, but in his time and not ours (p. 140).” Justin & Lindsey Holcomb in *Rid of My Disgrace*

“God has designed our relationships to function as both a diagnosis and a cure. When we are frustrated and ready to give up, God is at work, revealing the places where we have given in to a selfish agenda (the diagnosis). He then uses that new awareness to help us grow precisely where we have struggled (the cure) (p. 48-49).” Tim Lane & Paul Tripp in *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*

“Mercy is my commitment to live alongside you in this broken world even though I will suffer with you, for you, and because of you (p. 137)... Mercy understands that grace is a better pathway to change than condemnation, but it never compromises what is morally right and true (p. 139).” Tim Lane & Paul Tripp in *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*

Embedded Study

Are you enjoying where you are? Even if you are not “there yet,” can you identify aspects of this part of your journey that make it significantly better than where you’ve been? Unless you can answer “yes” to this question and take delight in that answer, perseverance will be grueling. *Striving without delighting is exhausting.*

One of the keys to persevering, especially with a struggle as recurrent as anger, is the ability to enjoy an imperfect, in-process life. God does not just delight in you at the culmination of your sanctification. God delights in you right now. He invites you to agree with him; where he has you in this process is good. This provides the emotional stability and security to persevere in your journey.

With that as our starting point, let’s ask the question, “What does it look like to continue to follow God from *here*?” Chances are that you’ve put so much energy into getting “here” that it is not entirely clear how to prepare yourself for life after an intensive focus on change. What do you do when your life is not focused on overcoming anger? That is the topic of this step and the next.

As we discuss perseverance, we will use three headings to guide our thoughts.

1. **Common Lies and Distractions:** There are many good materials on overcoming anger. Hopefully, we have referenced many of those most rooted in Scripture and the Gospel. Most resources, however, stop with the battle plan for victory. It is as if they give us the book of Joshua (the plan for capturing the Promised Land; see Joshua 1) without the warning of Judges (the plan for maintaining victory; see Judges 2:6-10). In this section we will examine five lies or distractions that frequently cause a regression in progress made with anger.
2. **Victory Changes Temptation:** Defeat intensifies temptation with shame, defensiveness, and the identity of being a failure. However, victory can intensify temptation with pride, carelessness, and the drift towards independence. If you have made it to this point in the study, chances are the nature of your temptation is changing. This does not mean you need a new plan, but that you will be applying the core principles of your plan in a new (more positive) context.
3. **Preparing for Transition:** Chances are you have taken this journey in a G4 group or with a mentor. If that is the case, then you will soon see that level of interaction begin to change. Anger should not be the primary focus of the rest of your life. We do not want to become addicted to recovery. Part of persevering well is establishing life habits and relationships that will spur you on to pursue God in every area of life. We have worked to overcome anger so that our life could become balanced and fulfill God’s purposes. Overcoming anger was only an important piece of that larger journey.

Common Lies and Distractions

“Now I can get back to focusing on what is important to me.” This can often be a version of Proverbs 26:11, “Like a dog that returns to his vomit, is a fool who repeats his folly.” It can be a subtle departure from the questions, “What is healthy? How can I love God and love others? Where should I find contentment?” If entertained wrongly, this statement becomes the access point for self-centeredness to return and for ruling desires to regain their old strength.

What have you sacrificed as you have fought against sinful anger? Was it worth it? Do not forget that “your old life” was not good. If your old life becomes the standard of enjoyment, then sinful anger will certainly enter through that Trojan Horse. In the course of embracing the gospel and developing a plan for cooperating with God’s grace, you were defining “a new life” with new values. Be sure as you have more time to invest in areas of personal interest (a genuinely good thing), so that you are not exchanging the cure for the cause.

“I deserve a break. I’ve been good long enough.” This statement makes non-anger the exception. It defines “good” as an abnormal part of our life. It reveals that we are still living primarily out of our old identity and values. We are still viewing life as “our time” of which we give God pieces. These kinds of statements often indicate that we are viewing God as a relentless task master. It will be very hard to sustain devotion to a God we view to be against us or unreasonable.

Reflect on the grace you have received in this journey. How is your life better now and still improving compared with when you started this study? Why would you want a break from that? Really answer the why question and do not treat it as a rhetorical guilt-device. God’s design for your life involves rest (Exodus 20:8-11). If you are not experiencing that rest, you are probably not pursuing God’s objectives for your life in God’s ways. Remember the advice that God gave Moses through his father-in-law: if what you are doing is not sustainable, then it is not good, because God is reasonable (Exodus 18:15-23).

“It is not working. Life is still hard. Nobody else is having to try this hard.” In this statement we are defining “working” as ease and completion. Anger is a necessary emotion as moral beings in a fallen world. We will not abstain from anger like we can from drugs. We will strive to express anger according the seven tests (Step 2) for the rest of our life. Our goal is to see the “wave” of sinful anger shrink in all three dimensions (Step 7) over the course of our life. In reality, “working” means that with each failure we return to God’s grace earlier in the progression of our sin and that we approach others with an increasingly humble and self-aware confession.

In this statement we are also treating spiritual maturity as if it were a competitive sport. One person getting hit by a truck has no impact on the pain felt by another person who hits his thumb with a hammer. If Sir Hammnerthumb decides he should not feel pain because he was not hit by a truck, he will be disappointed.

We do not know what aspects of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-20) another person struggles with or how severely. If we become a marathon runner distracted by the runners ahead of us, we will not finish the race (2 Tim. 4:7). Your hope is not found in doing better than other Christians. When we are discouraged by something that cannot also give us true hope, then it reveals that we are deceived or significantly distracted.

“[Name] is still not trusting me.” If this kind of thinking causes our efforts to diminish, then it reveals that we were changing to please a person more than to honor God. Ultimately, this always leads to disappointment, because people were not made to bear the weight of our hope. Change is hard and it requires a great deal of hope to persevere. This is why who and what we ask to “carry” our hope is so important.

As both an encouragement and warning, realize that legitimate discouragement is not the same as a reason for quitting. It may be that the lack of trust is a legitimate hurt. God often uses the alleviation of consequences as a way to encourage us. But we do not get to pick how God will sustain us by His grace. If we become fixated on one form of absent encouragement we desire, then it will blind us to many expressions of God’s grace which are sufficient to sustain us.

“[Blank] situation is more important than my character.” This is the tyranny of the urgent. When anger was the “big problem,” everything else waited. Now that anger has lessened, other things (often legitimate things) take front stage in our thoughts. However, when we say (rarely out loud or overtly) that a situation is more important than our character, we are beginning to use situations to justify sin again. If this is allowed, it will only be a matter of time before anger becomes the “big problem” again, and forces us to neglect other very important things in order to re-tame our anger.

Be on guard when you begin to describe the magnitude of a situation to defend your anger. This should be an internal red flag. It is an indication that we are no longer looking for the “way out” that God promised to provide and that we are not believing God could have empowered us to endure the situation without sin (1 Cor. 10:13). When we doubt God in these ways we have to begin to adjust our values to correspond with a world in which everything is up to us. That means we begin to define “practical” in a God-less frame of reference.

Victory Changes Temptation

Disappointment from New Heights: Poverty hurts differently when you’ve known wealth. As you build trust with others, sinning against them in anger will likely create a stronger response of guilt than you knew previously. When sinful anger was “normal,” it was less startling. It can be tempting to allow this intensified guilt to fuel a major sense of failure and fall back into anger again full force. You must recognize (intellectually and emotionally) that God’s grace is sufficient and necessary for falls from any “height” (in quotation because this is our category more than God’s).

A protection from this temptation is to remember that spiritual maturity does not mean independence from God’s grace (see next point), but a greater reliance upon it. **Read 1 Timothy 1:12-20.** Notice that towards the end of Paul’s ministry he saw himself as more of a sinner than at the beginning (Acts 9). Paul is using this realization as an encouragement to young Timothy (v. 18-20) because he realizes it is the reliance on grace that is the essence of his message (v. 16).

Maturity and Independence: We often are deceived into thinking that spiritual maturity should cause us to be less reliant upon God. “So God can focus more on the people who are where we used to be.” This is a most dangerous mutation in our temptation. It is like a great oak tree thinking its height and hardness means it no longer requires the soil. As soon as it detaches from the soil, its height and hardness only serve to quicken its fall.

Maturity can only be expressed as greater dependence upon God. Maturity requires this humility like trains require tracks. **Read Galatians 2:18-21.** Notice that Paul warns against rebuilding what was torn down (v. 18). This is exactly what a false view of maturity does. It is from this warning that Paul lays down the principle that maturity is less of me and more of

Christ (v. 20). Like a caterpillar matures into a butterfly, we are called to mature into something different from what we started. We started “grounded and crawling” in our independence from God (the essence of sin). We mature into those who embrace dependence upon God as the wings God intended to provide us freedom.

Pressure of New Opportunities: With growth comes opportunity, and not necessarily because we are seeking it. Angry parents who learn godly self-control will find themselves having conversations with their children that they would have been scared to bring to them previously. Angry spouses who learn to be other-minded will make decisions with their spouse that were avoided before. These are immense blessings, but can also create the kind of pressure that has been historically pushed away by anger. Now life is new and defenseless.

Begin by keeping a list of new responsibilities and opportunities God brings into your life. Give thanks for them regularly. Remember they are tokens of God’s grace; not burdens. Remember that overcoming anger is not the end of your journey. Anger has been a reason for not learning many incredible things (facts, skills, relationships) that God has for you. You should expect to learn (if you maintain the humble disposition) many things as you persevere.

Having “Answers” Instead of Questions: As you mature and receive new opportunities, you will likely be looked to for more answers. You are becoming a “safe” person who can be asked more questions. You may also get the privilege of walking with others who are in an earlier stage of overcoming anger. This is a time when the pride of anger can return in more subtle and socially-acceptable ways. We must never think that because a question is brought to us that we are the source of its answer. We must never mistake the glory of the answer for the glory of the vessel (2 Cor. 4:7-18).

These opportunities are opportunities to grow in healthy fear. Just as unhealthy fear often sparks sinful emotions (including anger), healthy fear creates godly emotions (including anger). **Read James 3:1-12.** Notice that James is writing to Christians coming out of a struggle (dispersion by religious persecution; see James 1:1) who are now rising to the position of teacher (v. 1). He warns them about the temptation and power of their words in this new role. The message is that the awesome power of influence (bridle and fire images) should keep humble those who are coming into positions of influence.

Preparing for Transition

Make sure you are in a small group. Trust takes time. The baton of trust will soon be passed from your G4 Group or mentor to the more regular ministries of the Body of Christ. The primary location in which this occurs is small groups. The lessons (cognitive and emotional) that God has taught you in the course of this study have been enhanced, protected, and applied largely because of the relationships in which you learned them. The same thing is true for the next (and all other) lessons that God has for you.

This is why it is wise for you to begin getting plugged into a general small group if you are not already. If you need help identifying which small group would be a good fit for you talk with your G4 leader, mentor, or a church pastor.

Learn accountability on a broader scale. Walking through this material with someone else may be the first time you have experienced ongoing, Christian accountability. Accountability is not just for life-dominating struggles. It is part of God’s definition of “healthy.” People who do not have relationships in which they are honest about their struggles seeking accountability and encouragement are people who are becoming “unhealthy.”

As you move from a G4 Group or mentor relationship focused primarily upon anger to a general small group, you may wonder what accountability will look like now. The seven points below are meant to guide you in the kind of relationships you are looking to form with your small group.

1. Voluntary – Accountability is not something you have; it is something you do. You must disclose in order to benefit from the relationship. Hopefully, the positive experience you have had going through this material will encourage you to remain transparent and vulnerable.
2. Trusted – The other person(s) is someone you trust, admire their character, and believe has good judgment. You are encouraged to join a small group now so that you can build this trust before graduating from your G4 Group or mentor relationship.
3. Mutual – Relationships that are one-sided tend to be short-lived. In the small group you will hear the struggles of others as you share your own. You will help carry their burden as they help carry yours (Gal 6:1-2).
4. Scheduled – Accountability that is not scheduled tends to fade. This is why small groups that meet on a weekly basis are an ideal place for accountability to occur. Everyone knows when to meet and has a shared expectation for how the accountability conversations will begin.

5. Relational – We want spiritual growth to become a lifestyle not an event. This means that we invite accountability to be a part of our regular conversations not just something that we do at a weekly meeting. It should mean that there are times when we are doing accountability and don't realize it.
6. Comprehensive – Accountability that exclusively fixates on one subject tends to become repetitive and fade. It also tends to reduce “success” in following God to a single variable. As you seek “comprehensive” accountability after this study, you should also have friends ask you about matters from the “Current Life Situation” assessment you did in Step 3 and where forms of selfishness, laziness, or withdrawal might be occurring in significant relationships.
7. Encouraging – Too often the word “accountability” carries the connotation of “sin hunt.” When that is the case accountability is only perceived to be “working” when it is negative. However, accountability that lasts should celebrate growth in character as fervently as it works on slips in character. This means asking each other questions about, “When have you had victory in your area of struggle?” in addition to questions about temptations and falls.

Have a plan for future study. We walk forward. We drift backwards. For some time now you have been a part of an intentional, structured process. If you leave that structure without a continued plan for deepening your understanding and application of Scripture to the struggles of life, you will regress. Ephesians 5:15-16 calls us to intentionality out of a recognition that time minus direction equals decay not healing.

Appendix B provides an annotated bibliography (list of books with a content summary) of resources that make a good extension of this material. These resources address anger, conflict resolution, communication in general, marriage, relationships in general, fear, decision making, and the change process. If one of these does not stand out as what you need to study next, then it is recommended you study “Finding Your Identity, Security, and Confidence in Christ” (bradhambrick.com/identity) as a resource to help you solidify your progress.

This entire study has been filled with devotional Bible studies. If you have not been taking the time to read the passages and reflect on the devotional thoughts / questions that accompany them, consider using those as a guide for daily Bible reading. This will reinforce what you've learned in this study and further solidify the biblical basis for what you've learned.

Make a formal transition plan. Write out your transition plan. List the things that need to be in place before you “graduate” from your G4 Group or mentor relationship. List the important practices you have begun in this study that you will need to maintain. Write out what the “yellow flags” (don't wait for the red ones) would be that you should address seriously if they appear.

Review your plan with your G4 Group or mentor. Get their input on what needs to be added to the plan. In consultation with them, decide what aspects from that list need to be brought into the accountability conversation with your new small group before you graduate.

Accountability Focus (PERSEVERENCE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Are there any lies or distractions that I am beginning to believe or embrace?
- Can you see evidence that I am adapting well to new forms temptation?
- Does my transition plan seem wise and complete?

Step 9

“Change Is About More Than Me”

*Accepting the call to **STEWARD** all my life for God’s glory*

**“God has shown me great grace; grace greater than my anger.
I am learning what it means to live out of my new identity in Christ.
That has pushed me to ask the question,
‘How can I be a conduit of God’s grace to others?’
As I have sought God, examined my life, and consulted with fellow believers,
I believe this [describe] is what it looks like for me to steward God’s grace now.”**

Memorize: James 3:16-18 (ESV), “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Wisdom” – Overcoming anger is more about applied wisdom than emotional control.
- “First” – Overcoming anger is able to maintain focus on matters of first importance in a “crisis.”
- “Harvest” – Hopefully you can now begin to look to the future without a sense of dread.
- “Sown in peace” – Anger sows in the stress of thinking, “Everything depends upon me.”
- “Those who make peace” – Let the thought of being a “peace-producer” permeate your identity.

Teaching Notes

To “steward” something means to use it for God’s intended purpose. It is important to remember that what is being stewarded is your life, not the merely the experience of overcoming sinful anger. To think otherwise would be to define yourself by your struggle again.

Anger has prevented you from using particular gifts, talents, or passions for God’s glory. Anger has thwarted your ability to fulfill a life role (i.e, spouse, parent, worker, church member, etc...) the way God intended. As anger dissipates, do not neglect giving yourself fully to those roles in which God has placed you.

Sin is a parasite that lives off of stolen resources (time, energy, love, etc...) that were intended for other purposes. As we rid ourselves of this vile intruder, those resources upon which sin once indulged become available for God’s design and our true enjoyment. Ultimately, stewardship is the pinnacle where purpose, worship, and joy meet.

Unless we are convinced of this truth, we will return to our sin as the “good life” and grow dissatisfied with serving God out of a sense of duty. Stewardship is not how we “pay God back” for our sin, but how we live in the fullness for which we were created.

Embedded Study

In Step 6 we discussed the difference between running from sinful anger and running to the life God desires for us. Step 9 is devoted to the subject of "running to" God's design. You will do most of the writing in this chapter, because it is your life that is being stewarded for God's glory.

Your goal is find things that you could give yourself to more passionately than you once gave yourself to your anger. But not just temporal, slightly healthier things that would quickly become the next edition of ruling desires; and not things that you give yourself to in private so that they foster selfishness and excess. Rather, eternally significant things that you give yourself to in a community of faith to maintain endurance, temper desire mutation, and become an example to others.

Read Luke 11:24-26. This is a terrifying warning about removing sin without also replacing it with God's purposes for your life. When we replace sin with a "godless healthy" (contradiction acknowledged) we become very proud and defensive about further change. Our idols (ruling desires) initially become functional so the warning system of life consequences is muted. When our idols cease to satisfy, and become disruptive again we are less likely to return to God, the Bible, and the Gospel because "they didn't really work the first time." We go looking for "deeper and more meaningful" solutions. Indeed, "the last state of that person is worse than the first (v. 26)."

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. In this study we have traveled through the gospel (v. 8-9) to good works (v. 10). *The nine steps are merely the gospel in slow motion.* We are not now exiting the gospel in order to do good works, but cultivating the fruit of the gospel. Paul says that there are "good works" that "God prepared" for every believer and that these should define our daily lives ("that we should walk in them") (v. 10). There are answers to the questions you will be asked next. You can have confidence that God has a design for your life and wants you to know what it is.

As you read through and answer these nine questions, remember God's patience and timing. There will be some aspects of God's design that you can engage in immediately. There will be ways you want to serve God that will require you to more mature or be equipped before you are prepared to fulfill them. The main thing is to begin to have a vision for life that involves being God's servant and actively engaging that vision where you are currently equipped.

1. Am I willing to commit my life to whatever God asks of me? This is a "do not pass go" question. If your answer is "no," it will bias the answers you give to each subsequent question. Do not get lost in guilt or pretend that it is "yes" (both responses would lead you back into anger). Rather, identify the obstacle. What is the cost you are unwilling to pay? It may be that this subject becomes a key element in your "plan for future study" (Step 8)?

Are there specific things you believe God is asking of you? Be sure to record your thoughts on this question before reflecting on the subsequent questions.

2. What roles have I neglected that God has placed me in? The first part of being a good steward of one's life is to fulfill one's primary roles with excellence. When Paul says in Ephesians 5:17 that we are to "understand what the will of the Lord is," he goes on to describe God's design for major life roles (spouse, parent, child, and worker in 5:22-6:9).

3. What are my spiritual gifts? Stewarding your life for the glory of God involves utilizing the spiritual gifts God has given you. God gives spiritual gifts that coincide with the calling He places on each individual's life. Read Romans 12:1-8 and I Corinthians 12:1-30. If you need further assistance discerning this, talk to a pastor about taking a spiritual gifts inventory.

4. For what group of people (age, struggle, career, ethnic, etc...) am I burdened? From God’s earliest covenant with people His intention was to bless us that we might be a blessing to others (Gen 12:2). By investing your life in those you have a burden for allows you to be other-minded and find joy in it.

5. What am I passionate about? At this point in the stewardship evaluation, you can begin to see Psalm 37:3-8 fulfilled in your life. Notice the connection between trusting God, receiving the desires of your heart, and refraining from anger in this passage. As you tame (not eliminate) your ruling desires, you no longer have to worry about James 4:3 interfering with the expression of your passions and the realization of your heart’s desires in blessing others.

6. With what talents or abilities has God blessed me? These need not be spiritual gifts. Read the amazing description of abilities God gave Bezalel and how he used those abilities to serve God (Exodus 31:1-11). Think through the skills and expertise you have accumulated in your life.

7. What are my unique life experiences? Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences should be listed. We are sometimes tempted to think that God can only use the good or spiritual experiences of our lives. God is glad to use our successes (Matt. 5:16), but God also delights in displaying His grace by transforming our low points for His glory (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

8. Where do my talents and passions match up with the needs in my church and community? We should seek to steward our lives in cooperation with our local church. God’s way of blessing and maturing those we serve is through the Body of Christ, the church. By identifying where your gifts, burdens, passions, and abilities fit within or expanding your church’s ministries, you are maximizing the impact service can have on those you are seeking to bless.

9. How would God have me bring these things together to glorify Him? This is not a new question, but a summary question. Look back over what you have written. Talk about it with your Christian friends, family, mentor, or pastors. Dedicate a time to prayerfully ask God to give you a sense of direction. Then begin serving as a way to steward your life for God’s glory.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Matthew 5:9

Accountability Focus (STEWADING):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Are there any necessary changes I have omitted that would prevent me from taking this step?
- Is there advise or counsel I should seek before completing this step?

Appendix A

The Forgiveness Trap

Forgiveness is never simple or straight-forward because it always involves both sin and sinners. Worse yet, it always involves a sinner who has sinned against another sinner.

Usually in the post-sin, pre-confession stage of the process there is some clear role definition. One person is the offender. The other person is the offended. I acknowledge that we are all sinners, but for repentance and forgiveness to occur, these roles must be defined even if they are alternated.

During this post-sin, pre-confession there is usually some delay of time when the offending party(s) is trying to decide if they are going to repent. They replay the events looking for a way to justify their actions. Maybe they weigh out whether their actions were “wrong enough” to warrant an apology. But in order to enter “the forgiveness trap” the offending party must come to the person they offended in repentance.

Eventually they come to the person they offended and say, “I was wrong for doing what I did. Will you forgive me?” The trap has been set. But wait a minute. You’re thinking, “What is wrong with that?” Nothing. That is exactly what should happen. I am not saying that the trap is manipulative or intentional.

So what is the trap? The trap is an immediate role reversal in which if the offended person does not promptly reply with absolute forgiveness, the sinner versus saint roles are reversed. The white hat and the black hat switch heads. Oftentimes a hesitancy in forgiveness is perceived (or even declared) to be a greater sin than the original offense and the offended person is not even given the same period of time to forgive that the offending person took to repent.

I am not saying this is what should happen, but it’s often what does happen. Sometimes, it is an innocent misapplication of biblical teaching on forgiveness. Other times, it is manipulative form of repentant-revenge.

I am not saying that forgiveness is optional. Even if the offending person does not repent, forgiveness is commanded as an authentic expression of our appreciation for Christ’s forgiveness of us (Eph. 4:32).

But too often, “the trap” assumes this must be done immediately and that full trust must be restored upon forgiveness. We must remember that while God can command forgiveness, the offending person cannot. The offending person *requests* forgiveness, recognizing forgiveness is an act of grace. To demand forgiveness and use Scripture to pressure forgiveness is a sign that the “repenting” person does not understand what he/she is asking.

As a general guide line, I advise a repenting person to wait at least as long as it took them to repent before they mention the offended person’s obligation to forgive. In cases of traumatic offenses or painful betrayals it may be wise to wait longer. If not, it falls into the “now I’m the good guy and you’re the bad guy... God’s on my team” trap.

It should also be noted that the restoration of trust and forgiveness are two distinct but related things. One can “cancel a debt” without being eager to “give more credit.” Attacking someone with their fault is a sign of unforgiveness, but a hesitancy to potentially place one’s self in harms-way again is not. If these two things are treated as the same thing, they create another “forgiveness trap.”

Appendix B

RECOMMENDED READINGS

***Uprooting Anger* by Robert Jones:** This book provides an excellent practical theology of anger. You have sampled many quotes from Dr. Jones in this study. If your struggle with anger still persists frequently, this would be a good next resource to read.

***How to Be Good and Angry (CD)* by Paul Tripp:** This is a recording of a seminar on anger taught by Paul Tripp. It also provides an excellent practical theology of anger. The presentation is 2 hours long. It would be a good resource to keep in your vehicle and review regularly.

***Peacemaking for Families* by Ken Sande & Tom Raabe:** This book focuses upon conflict resolution. If your self-control is stronger than your ability to resolve conflict this would a good next resource for you.

***War of Words* by Paul Tripp:** In this book Paul Tripp provides a biblical overview of the theory and practice of communication. It applies the principles from this seminar to the broader subject of communication.

***Angry Children (booklet)* by Michael Emler:** If your children struggle with anger, then this brief resource provides you with guidance to apply these materials at the level of an adolescent.

***Get Outta My Face!* by Rick Horne:** If your teenager struggles with anger or lack of motivation, Rick Horne does an excellent job of talking to parents about how to communicate the principles of this seminar to their teenagers.

***Choosing Forgiveness* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss:** For many who struggle with anger, forgiveness is something they need to learn. If your struggle with anger stems from bitterness or past hurts, this would be an good follow up resource.

***How People Change* by Tim Lane and Paul Tripp:** Change is hard; angry or not. If you want a better understanding of how God transforms the lives of His people, this is the book to read.

***Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* by Tim Lane & Paul Tripp:** Anger most often expresses itself in relationships. If relationships are confusing to you and this contributes to your anger, then this is the book to read next.

***When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch:** Insecurity can be a major trigger for anger and defensiveness. If you struggle with insecurity, then this is a must read.

***Running Scared* by Ed Welch:** Fear is another significant trigger for anger. If themes of fear emerged frequently in the course of this study, then this would be a good follow up.

***The Discipline of Grace* by Jerry Bridges:** If you struggled with the thought “I should just do better” (as if more will power should be all that’s needed) throughout this study, then Bridges work is an important book for you to read.

***When I Don’t Desire God* by John Piper:** If you struggled to love God as this study encouraged, then John Piper’s book does a good job of examining what to do when our heart is not satisfied in/with God.

***Marriage Matters* by Winston Smith:** If your anger shows up most in your home, then Winston Smith has written a practical book to describe how God intends to use your marriage to shape your character.

***What Did You Expect?* by Paul Tripp:** One of the euphemisms for ruling desires is expectations. Paul Tripp looks at the kind of commitments that create a healthy marriage and how to prevent those commitments from becoming a battle ground.

***Step by Step* by James Petty:** Uncertainty about how to make decisions or know the will of God can be a point of division and anger. Petty provides a very readable and practical process for thinking through decision making.

***The Enemy Within* by Kris Lungaard.** Behind all sinful anger is our own heart. Lungaard has updated a classic work on conquering sin by John Owen into a brief and readable modern work.

***The Emotionally Destructive Relationship* by Leslie Vernick.** There is the other side of anger; being the recipient. Vernick does an excellent job of discussing how to see, stop, and survive a destructive relationship.

Appendix C

Parenting Tips & Family Devotions

Written by Caroline Von Helm, M.A. and Brad Hambrick, Th.M.

Things for Parents to Remember

We all want our children to “do what we say more than do what we do”. This is especially true when it comes to expressing anger. As you have learned in this seminar, anger is an emotion that reveals a ruling desire or heart problem that is occurring. This is as true for our children as it is for us as their parents.

However, children, depending on their age, cannot necessarily be aware of the underlying desire, but you can help by teaching them to identify those desires in themselves. This is a large part of what it means to disciple your children. It is not just about putting The Word into your child’s world, but also about helping your child to put his/her world into words (that emanate from a biblical foundation and Gospel-dependence).

As you teach your children you have learned about anger here are 8 key points to keep in mind.

1. **Love your child unconditionally.** This may seem unnecessary to say, but it is something we need to keep at the forefront of our mind when talking about anger in children, and how to help them with anger. Children act out behaviorally most of the time. Their behaviors can be triggers for our own anger, but remember that children rarely verbalize their thoughts and feelings before acting on them.

Verbalizing (which involves self-awareness, humility, and trust) before acting is a skill they have to be taught and is a key part of their discipleship (the cultivation of patience and self-control, Galatians 5:22-23). Some practical suggestions on how to express unconditional love are: make eye contact with them when they speak, give physical and verbal affection frequently and appropriately, and plan quality time to spend with them.
2. **Remember where your children are developmentally.** Learn to speak age appropriately to your children. This involves the words you speak, the duration of instructive conversations, and the amount of interaction (monologues are almost always ineffective). Development, broken down simply, can be put in three categories; birth to age five; 6 to 12 years; and 13 and above.
 - The primary objectives from birth to 5 years are safety and security, feeling a part of the family, and creating identity. Without safety and security anger makes sense as a necessary means of self-protection. Does your home lay the foundation for a healthy expression of anger?
 - From 6 to 12 years the focus is on character development. Children during this age are forming desires both good and bad. Parents should observe their children and teach them what those desires are, and how to bring them under the authority of Christ.
 - Typically, after the age of 12, the child moves to internalizing things for themselves. At this age, we want to see children begin to make choices and handle consequences more and more on their own. The beginning of internalization of values begins to take shape, and it is important to be aware of where their values are coming from.
3. **Do not make your child’s anger as complicated as your own anger.** Identifying underlying desires in your child can be easier to identify than your own. Start with the desires for safety, control, and acceptance. Most of the time, these three things are what our children crave most. Our children have not developed the complicated mechanisms we have to hide or express anger.
4. **Do not discipline in anger.** Again, this may sound like common sense, but many parents see an action in their child they do not like, and choose to react. Instead parents should step back, identify the desire motivating their child’s behavior (and their own response of anger), and work the plan. Make it a priority to stop and think through habits of discipline. Make decisions, as much as you can beforehand, on how you will handle behaviors and address heart issues. We cannot expect our children to handle their anger with more maturity than the adults God has placed over them for protection, instruction, and example.
5. **Model repentance and forgiveness.** There will be times when it is appropriate to ask your child for forgiveness, as well as respond to their request for forgiveness. It seems unnatural to humble oneself before a child but can serve as a reminder of the Gospel, and the humility that Christ demonstrated through the incarnation and crucifixion.

6. **Praise your children for handling their feelings appropriately.** Recognizing maturity and progress in our children perpetuates their continual growth. Maturity will not mean perfection. It is wise and good to affirm incremental progress even if there are still areas of improvement. If you only recognize the instances when they fail, it becomes discouraging and the focus becomes negative.
7. **Pray for your child’s salvation.** It is easy to forget that as much as you need the Gospel and God’s help in overcoming anger, your child needs Christ’s intervening help. It is easy to assume that a child’s battle with sin is “easy” because they are young. If your child has not accepted salvation, then true help and healing will not take place outside of it. This does not mean we stop parenting until they do, only that we continue to speak truth, model good behavior, discipline in a way that balances grace and truth, and pray for their eyes to be opened.
8. **Never stop teaching, modeling, and proclaiming the Gospel to your family.** It is our only hope and source of power. The more we recognize our dependence on Christ and need for His salvation, the more our children will. If we live Gospel-centered lives, our children will be encouraged to do so as well.

Family Devotions & Parenting Tips

Chapter One

Learning to ADMIT my anger is anger and that it is mine.

Devotion for Proverbs 19:19. Ask your children to come up with things that make them angry. If they find it difficult, think of things you have seen your children get angry about and mention those. (Ex. Not being able to go outside, not being able to play video games, sibling taking something that was theirs, parents schedule overriding their agenda, being left out by friends, sporting events...)

Help your children identify the ways they respond when these things happen (pout, yell, whine, throw toys, walk away, etc...).

Help your child identify effective ways to express feelings that are appropriate. When your child begins to pout, yell, or whine, stop your child in the middle of these actions and calmly say, “I can see you are angry right now, what are you angry about?” Try to get them to verbalize what they are feeling. If they can’t, offer suggestions. Teach them to say, “I am mad that I don’t get to go over to my friends house, or I am mad that I can’t play longer.” Maybe they are scared about something, or worried. At this point, express that those things can be disappointing, fearful, or worrisome but the next time things like that happen, you would like for them to be able to express it by saying, “Dad/Mom, I really want to play longer, but know that you told me I couldn’t. This makes me angry.” If your child can do this, they are on their way to being able to handle their anger appropriately.

If your child is so angry they cannot calm down, then you go with them on a walk or some other physical activity to get out excess energy, if they don’t want to do something physical then give them the opportunity to calm down on their own by time in their room alone, or sitting and reading. Once they have calmed down to the point of being able to have a conversation then walk them through what got them angry, their underlying desire, how you would like to see them handle things, etc...

This is an opportunity to point out not only times when you see your child getting angry, but also times that they could have reacted in anger but didn’t or did get angry but expressed their upset with self-control. It may also be appropriate for you to share your own struggle with anger, things you get angry about, and ways you handle your anger. Explain Proverbs 19:19 to your family.

Devotion for James 1:19-21. Get a deck of cards. On the first attempt to build a “house of cards” tell the kids you are going to have a race to see who can build a three level house first. Let them rush and fail a few times. Read the key passage. Explain that our anger is often like this activity. Anger rushes things and does not allow us to accomplish good things. It is only when we trust God and others He has placed in authority that we will see the good things He intends for our lives accomplished. Make a second attempt to build the house of cards this time emphasizing trust and patience. Take a picture of your house of cards, put it on the refrigerator, and post these verses below it. See the blog post “Anger is a Rushed Emotion” at bradhambrick.com for more ideas to illustrate this aspect of anger.

Chapter Two

Humbly ACKNOWLEDGING the breadth and impact of my anger problem.

Devotion for Luke 6:43-45. Give your children a visual of the key teaching in this passage. Take a glass of water and shake it. When water comes out, ask, “Why did water come out of the glass?” Most likely they will answer, “Because you shook it.” Kindly say, “No,” and repeat the question emphasizing the word water. After a couple tries tell them, “Water came out of the glass because water was in the glass. If it were a glass of milk and I shook it milk would have come out.”

Our hearts are like that glass. When life shakes us the content of our heart is revealed. We cannot blame our sinful actions on the things that happen outside of us. “You cannot blame your brother taking your toy for why you hit him anymore than I should blame your disobedience for why I yell at you. In those situations you wanted to enjoy the toy more than to love your brother and I let my desire for a peaceful evening override my responsibility to honor you.”

Use this conversation as another opportunity to present the Gospel to your child. Christ comes to change hearts. He wants to keep their hearts and minds healthy. Only Jesus can change our hearts. Talk about how you still need the Gospel even as a Christian parent.

Follow Up Study: *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones – “God Sends Help” starting on page 326.

Chapter Three

Beginning to UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my anger.

Parenting Reflection: Review pages 22-23 in this anger seminar notebook and reflect on the life of your child. Consider their personality, temperament, family history, and current life situation. By evaluating where your child is in each area you will have a better understanding of how to help your child.

Part of your role as a parent is captured in Proverbs 20:5, “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.” You are a “person of understanding” in your child’s world. It is your responsibility to help them understand their ruling desires and the influences that contribute to those desires.

Parenting Tip: When your child enjoys something new or makes a new friend ask, “What made that fun for you?” Help them put into words the desires that drive during good times and celebrate them when they are expressed healthily, so that desire does not become a guilt word/concept in your home.

Chapter Four

Recognizing my need to REPENT to God for my anger

It is important to teach what repentance means whether your child has recognized their need to repent and embrace Christ as Savior yet or not. We cannot make our children repent (ultimately for salvation or temporarily for a given sin) anymore than someone could make us.

“Repent” means to change direction. Acknowledging God’s Lordship (to commit to go “God’s way”) is central in repentance. What does this look like for a child? Remember children reflect what is modeled, and learn through observation. So as we model repentance as turning back to God’s lordship, and not letting anger rule, we can better help our children understand this.

Younger children have a less difficult time understanding Lordship than older children and adults because much of their lives are lived under some authority. So, it is not surprising to them that God wants to be Lord as well. It is the explanation of why He deserves it that will be central.

This leads us back to the Gospel. God created them, knows them better, and loves them more passionately than anyone. It is very important to teach our children that God’s desire for Lordship is out love for them, not a need He is trying to fulfill in Himself. It is equally important that we root our expectations of our children in love for them and not in trying to get our children to fulfill some need in us.

Devotion from Acts 3:19-20. Show your children a scar you have or an infected cut (you might also use the internet or a first aid book). Explain how not properly cleaning a cut results in scarring or infection. Then read Acts 3:19-20. Explain that repentance is not meant to be a form of punishment. Jesus has already taken our punishment. That is why we get to repent. Repentance is how God cleanses the injury of our sin so that it does not leave a scar on our character. When we understand repentance rightly (even though it may sting a little) it become a time of refreshing rather than a time of dread.

Parenting Evaluation: How well do you model God’s response to your repentance when your children repent to you? If we are ever going to overcome anger (or any other sin) repentance must be associated with relational restoration or we will avoid it and the “infection” will get worse.

Follow Up Study: *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones -- “A New Way to See” starting on page 334 tells the story of Saul and shows the dramatic repentance he had.

Chapter Five

Accepting the Necessity to CONFESS to those Affected

Confession is very hard for most people. As chapter five points out, anger is the exact opposite of confession and goes in contrast to what was trying to be achieved in the first place. Anger wants its way, confession is submitting to the way of Christ.

The steps outlined in chapter five from *Peacekeeping for Families* should be taught and modeled with children. When your child has hurt someone with their anger, walk your child through these steps.

1. Teach your child to **address everyone involved**. If he lost his temper at a sporting event, then the whole team. If at school, then to those teachers or classmates who were affected. If at home, then to all family members involved. Remember, you must be willing to model this as well.
2. Teach your child **the vocabulary of repentance**. Sit down with your child and plan out what they should say. Teach your child how to own his anger, and help him or her recognize it was God they wronged first and then the other person.
3. Teach your child to **name specifically** what they did. At this point in the process, your tone should be instructive rather than corrective. If not, then the affect will likely be shaming your child rather than helping them grow in godliness.
4. Teach your child to **apologize**. A good question to ask your child is How do you think (name of people offended) felt when (name their action) happened? Most times when you ask children this question they will get defensive. Don't get defensive back, calmly say, "I am trying to help you see from other people's perspective." Teaching empathy in children is a necessary task in helping children develop character and is key in making a genuine apology.
5. Teach your child how to **accept the consequences**. This may be an appropriate time for self disclosure for times that you had to accept consequence that were hard to bear. Do not be afraid to let your children feel appropriate guilt (which is different from shame) and emotions surrounding their behaviors. Do not rescue them from feeling badly; show them how to repent (turn from their actions) so they don't feel this way again.
6. Teach you children how they should have **handled their feelings differently**. If we always tell our children don't, no, stop, etc... how are they to know what is appropriate? Take the time when you tell them not to do something, the acceptable way to do it as well. It is often good to role play appropriate responses so that your child knows what it sounds and feels like to respond in a God-honoring fashion.
7. **Ask for forgiveness and allow time**. If children are confessing to other children, you will find not much time is needed. Children can be really forgiving and quick to reconcile relationships. It is adults that can take longer. Be quick to restore relationship with your child when they need your forgiveness. This does not mean a removal of consequences necessarily, but it does mean you as their parent can walk through those consequences with them and encourage them through it.

It is important to teach children this process, and it takes a lot more time than saying, "Go apologize to your sister", and them saying, "I'm sorry". You are trying to instill a way of thinking about their actions and how it violates God's desire for them and others.

Devotion from Matthew 7:1-5. Get three pairs of glasses. On one pair completely cover the lenses so no one can see out. On the second pair, use reading glasses or sunglasses where it is difficult to see, but still possible with struggle. Have your child put on each pair and ask them to try and take a third pair of glasses off another person. After they have tried to do it with the difficult pairs, ask them to do it with nothing on their eyes. This is an example of how confession frees us to see things as they should be and not only sin in another's life but also from their perspective. When we have anger it is hard to be empathetic.

Chapter Six

RESTRUCTURE LIFE to rely on the Gospel for heart change expressed in action

Parenting lasts a lifetime. It will look different at different ages, but you never stop being a parent. As you work on steps six through nine for yourself, they will flesh themselves out in your family. This will bring your family alongside you in your plan, and everyone will reap the benefits. God never finishes working on our character. The process of sanctification will never be complete this side of eternity. So steps six through nine lead parents back to praying for their children's salvation first and foremost. Once your children are saved, rejoice that God has entrusted you to be involved in part of their process of sanctification.

Devotion from Ephesians 4:29-32. Get some children’s building materials (Lego’s, tinker toys, etc...). Make a list of the good and bad things that the family has said to one another over the last week. Take a few minutes to build a house with the toys. Then as you read from the list of phrases ask the children to add or take away pieces based upon whether the words “built up” or “tore down” the house.

Afterwards spend some time playing with your kids and making the house bigger while talking about the kind of things the family should more often to build one another up. You might chose to leave the final product on display for a while. When “little brother” tears it up it may make for another teachable moment of all that has been learned up until this point.

Follow Up Study: *Tale of the Poisonous Yuck Bugs: Based on Proverbs 12:18* by Aaron Reynolds does an excellent of job illustrating the point of Ephesians 4:29 in a playful Dr. Seuss style book.

Chapter Seven

Gaining the flexibility and humility necessary to IMPLEMENT my plan

Devotion from Luke 6:27-31. Gather supplies to make a sandwich. This devotion may be good to do before dinner. Ask your children, “When do we make food?” The answer you are looking for is, “When we’re hungry.” If your kids are old enough to understand you might make a joke about how much more you spend when you go the grocery hungry.

Just like food is most relevant when we are hungry, self-control is most relevant when we have an enemy and patience is most relevant when something is irritating. This is why Jesus commands us to love our enemies (when we’re angry everyone starts to feel like our enemy) and went into so much detail to describe what it looks like.

Walk through the last several times when your child struggled with anger and talk about what it would mean for them to “love their enemy.” Give examples from your life of how you loved someone you thought was against you. This is another important time to emphasize how we rely on God to give us the love for others we do not naturally have. It is also a time to picture the Gospel that God loved us when we were hurting and offending Him.

Chapter Eight

Recognizing that change requires PERSEVERING over a lifetime

Devotion from 2 Timothy 2:24-25. Pick your children’s favorite role playing game. At my house, that would be “playing puppy.” Chose something that must be done (giving puppy a bath) and takes turns playing different roles within the game. Make sure you have fun with it as you play. The point that we want our children to see is that they naturally associate different behaviors and attitudes with different roles.

Side Note: If you act the family of puppies, you will probably learn a lot about your family dynamics in this exercise as you see your children act out the roles they learned from your home.

This was Paul’s point in 2 Timothy 2. If you truly view yourself as “The Lord’s servant (v. 24),” then you will respond differently to life situations. Being a Christian should change your identity and through that changed identity change your behavior. The ultimate key to controlling anger is to serve God rather than serve self.

You can also play the game backwards. Pick several life roles (i.e., teacher, librarian, police officer, coach) and act out the role. Have your child guess what you are. Allow them to pick a role and do the same. The same point can be made – our actions reveal who we are.

Chapter Nine

Accepting the call to STEWARD all my life for God’s glory

Devotion from James 3:16-18. While coloring a picture (see below) ask your child, “What is the opposite of anger?” You might warm them up with easier questions about the opposite of sad (happy), dark (light), or low (high). James 3:17 tells us that the opposite of angry is wise.

Get two identical coloring pages. Use a red crayon to color one and a blue crayon to color the other. Point out that the same picture looks very different based upon the color we use. James 3:18 says that the same life will look very different based on whether it is marked by anger or wisdom.

Our goal as we have studied anger together has been to allow more and more of our life to be colored by God’s wisdom so that our life looks like what He intended it to be. We should always remember that God does have a plan for our life and that our life is most enjoyable when we allow Him color our lives by loving Jesus and obeying the Bible.

When To Seek Professional Help for Your Child:

There are many times that problems start and parents struggle with knowing if what their child is experiencing is “normal behavior,” or if professional help is needed. The following questions are meant to guide parents in knowing what to do.

1. How much of daily, weekly, monthly life is effected? How often do you feel like you are dealing you're your child's anger? What is the intensity and duration of your child's anger? What are the triggers that you can identify? Hunger, sleep, attention?
2. How long has this been going on? (anything over six months is significant)
3. Have the behaviors gotten worse over time? Has pouting moved to whining, to yelling, to throwing things? Have behaviors moved from happening just at home to now school and home?
4. Has any traumatic event taken place to cause the behavior? Has anyone recently died, moved, other changes or things happened to the child?
5. Have the parenting attempts you have taken so far made things better or worse or no change?
6. Do you feel tense or frustrated in dealing with my child's behavior?

If most of the responses to these questions were negative then a first step would be discussing your child's behavior with your pediatrician and getting appropriate guidance about next steps to take.

Appendix D

What Do I Do Now?

A plumb line of the Summit counseling ministry is, “We don’t do events; we create resources.” That means you should be asking yourself, “What can or should I do with this information now?”

We have created a series of brief videos that answer that what-now question from several different perspectives. Each of these can be found at:

bradhambrick.com/whatnow

Personal Study or Small Group

Question: I’ve been to several of the Summit counseling seminars and notice there appears to be a couple of different kinds. You frequently recommend studying them as a small group or with a friend. That seems like a great idea, but since I haven’t done that before I’m not quite sure how to start something like that. Do you mind giving me guidance?

Pursue Personal Counseling

Question: After attending this seminar I realized I would like to pursue counseling to help me grow in this area. It sounded like there are several different options available. Would you mind explaining to me what those are and how I could connect with the one that best serves me need?

Leveraging My Workplace

Question: I’ve heard rumors that I’m supposed to be able to use the Summit counseling seminars to leverage my workplace for gospel influence. My first impression is that it sounds awkward and intrusive; like I’m telling people they’ve “got issues” or “need help.” But I’m also worried about putting up Christian material that might be offensive to some people who visit my workplace. But I would at least like to hear what you’ve got to say. How would this work?

As a Professional Counselor

Question: I’m a licensed counselor (LPC) and came across the Summit counseling seminars. I’m excited to see the church addressing these kinds of subjects, and I’m curious how you might see someone in my position (or a LCSW or LMFT) using the materials. I can see recommending them to my clients who are open to an overtly Christian aspect to their counseling, but it seems like there could be more uses than just counseling homework. Could you share your thoughts on how those in private practice might use these resources?

Our goal in Summit counseling is to (1) equip the church to care for one another and our community with excellence; (2) provide quality counseling services that allow our people to get involved in the lives of others with confidence – knowing additional, experienced care is available to come alongside them if needed; and (3) create ways for our members and other Christians in our community to leverage their workplace and careers for greater gospel impact in their spheres of influence.

We hope this seminar and these videos give you a vision for how this can happen and stirs a passion in you to be a part of God’s work of redeeming and restoring hurting individuals and families.

bradhambrick.com/angerseminar