

## How to Deal with Anger

### Matthew 5:21-37

Our scripture reading this morning deals with an issue that is as immediate as the latest newscast: anger. Two assumptions behind this passage are striking. First, anger destroys relationship in a way akin to murder. Second, regardless of who caused the problem in the relationship, the person who becomes aware of the difficulty is responsible for taking steps toward reconciliation.

The Mayo Clinic Staff asks these questions: Do you fume when someone cuts you off in traffic? Does your blood pressure rocket when your child or spouse refuses to cooperate? Anger is a normal and even healthy emotion — but it's important to deal with it in a positive way. Uncontrolled anger can take a toll on both your health and your relationships. Ready to get your anger under control? Start by considering these 10 anger management tips.

1. **Think before you speak.** In the heat of the moment, it's easy to say something you'll later regret. Take a few moments to collect your thoughts before saying anything — and allow others involved in the situation to do the same.

2. **Once you're calm, express your anger.** As soon as you're thinking clearly, express your frustration in an assertive but non-confrontational way. State your concerns and needs clearly and directly, without hurting others or trying to control them.

3. **Get some exercise.** Physical activity can help reduce stress that can cause you to become angry. If you feel your anger escalating, go for a brisk walk or run, or spend some time doing other enjoyable physical activities.

4. **Take a timeout.** Timeouts aren't just for kids. Give yourself short breaks during times of the day that tend to be stressful. A few moments of quiet time might help you feel better prepared to handle what's ahead without getting irritated or angry.

5. **Identify possible solutions.** Instead of focusing on what made you mad, work on resolving the issue at hand. Does your child's messy room drive you crazy? Close the door. Is your partner late for dinner every night? Schedule meals later in the evening — or agree to eat on your own a few times a week. Remind yourself that anger won't fix anything and might only make it worse.

6. **Stick with 'I' statements.** To avoid criticizing or placing blame — which might only increase tension — use "I" statements to describe the problem. Be respectful and specific. For example, say, "I'm upset that you left the table without offering to help with the dishes," instead of, "You never do any housework."

7. **Don't hold a grudge.** Forgiveness is a powerful tool. If you allow anger and other negative feelings to crowd out positive feelings, you might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice. But if you can forgive someone who angered you, you might both learn from the situation. It's unrealistic to expect everyone to behave exactly as you want at all times.

8. **Use humor to release tension.** Lightening up can help diffuse tension. Use humor to help you face what's making you angry and, possibly, any unrealistic expectations you have for how things should go. Avoid sarcasm, though — it can hurt feelings and make things worse.

9. **Practice relaxation skills.** When your temper flares, put relaxation skills to work. Practice deep-breathing exercises, imagine a relaxing scene, or repeat a calming word or phrase, such as, "Take it easy." You might also listen to music,

write in a journal or do a few yoga poses — whatever it takes to encourage relaxation.

**10. Know when to seek help.** Learning to control anger is a challenge for everyone at times. Consider seeking help for anger issues if your anger seems out of control, causes you to do things you regret or hurts those around you.

I believe Jesus would agree with tip number 7: the one about not holding a grudge. In these verses on anger Jesus offered us an interpretation that enlarges the frame for understanding the prohibition against murder. Jesus enlarged the prohibition by pointing to ways in which the anger of revenge or punishment that can lead to murder is also evident in the course of living. When you or I judge and insult a brother or sister in the community, as well as when you or I are in a legal conflict (both ways in which anger surfaces), you and I have an opportunity to rectify these situations by seeking the other person out so as to apologize (in the former case) or by making amends outside of the legal process (in the latter case). In both cases the objective is clear: to restore relationships through acts of reconciliation. Clearly Jesus was not rescinding the prohibition against murder, but he did place murder on a continuum of outcomes related to anger. Furthermore, Jesus was recognizing that humans do get angry; rather than prohibiting anger, he taught that it can be transformed by living as a peacemaker (cf. [5:9](#)), initiating acts that manifest the reign of God in our midst. **Marcia Y. Riggs**

Jesus made it clear that if we are in conflict with one of our brothers or sisters, we are to go and seek restoration or reconciliation with that person before we bring our gift to the altar. This would imply that old scores need to be settled and wounds healed before we gather around the communion table and worship before the Lord with a clear conscience and lighter heart. However, we also know that there are just those moments when this ideal does not seem immediately possible. The

process of reconciliation and forgiveness often takes time, and not a small amount of patience on the part of both parties. It could be an awkward situation, for all concerned, if folk refused to offer their gift—"ourselves, our souls and bodies"—because of some unresolved relationship, yet to be mended. However forgiveness is the first step toward reconciliation. It is the knowledge that we have been forgiven, and therefore we forgive those with whom we are in conflict.

It has been said that for most churchgoers, what is really closest to the heart and soul is the experience of worship. That is where we experience confession and forgiveness, reconnection with neighbors, and the renewal of life to make a difference in the world. Scratch us and you will not find a love of God's word as much as the love of worship. God's teachings and understanding give shape and meaning to the experience of faith.

One of the persons who recovered this insight for the church was the late Anglican bishop John A. T. Robinson. The good bishop defined the practice of Holy Communion as simply "making holy that which is common." In other words, we offer to God the totality of our lives—the darkness and the light—and it is blessed, made holy, and returned to us as the presence of the living Christ. We symbolize this in the gifts of bread and wine. Thus, it is Christ working in us and through us that eventually makes reconciliation possible. What we were unable to accomplish before is now a possibility. We do not have to do this all on our own. This understanding begins at our baptism, when each of us answered the baptismal promises with the phrase, "I will, with God's help." To think that we can accomplish everything on our own, without Christ's presence, is to carry a burden we cannot successfully bear.

During the great historical period in England known as the Oxford Movement, there was a renewed interest in the worship life of the church. While these clergy

sought splendor in worship, most of them had soup kitchens and pantries for the poor. There was a deep connection between worship and a starving world. That should tell us something. If we want to be equipped for the task ahead, worship is where it begins. We might say that the bread on the altar has a deep connection with the bread needed to satisfy the world's hunger. One of the members of this Oxford group said that the Holy Eucharist or Communion is the only truly democratic moment in life. When we are willing to come together to the altar, offer ourselves completely, and receive in return all that we need not just to survive, but to live, then we have experienced something remarkably different and essential. It is the ultimate leveler—where status and opinion fade away—for those in relationship and those who are yet to be in relationship, including those estranged from each other.

While we strive for Jesus' ideal, when things fall short of the mark, coming to the altar, offering one's gift, is not a bad place to start afresh. Jesus invited all sorts and conditions of folk to the table and that served as a unifying experience. It also served to encourage those at table to begin life again, committed to living faithfully and in harmony with each other.

Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, used to say to her fellow workers, particularly in difficult and stressful times: "If each of us could just remember that we are all created in the image of God, then we would naturally want to love more." At the holy altar, standing shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, we remember once again that in God's realm there are no outsiders. Every gift is accepted, each offering received.

From there the hard work begins, but what once seemed impossible is now possible. Then we hear Jesus' words anew—"Now, go and be reconciled." Charles James Cook

So what do we do when we are angry – remember that we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, forgiven, and loved. Go...forgive...reconcile...and love!

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