

Understanding Anger¹

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Anger	<i>Irritated, Touchy, Critical, Sarcastic, Frustrated, Annoyed, Hostile, Jealous, Defiant, Intolerant, Provoked, Furious, Violent, Hating, Mad, Angry, Exasperated, Aggressive, Enraged Outraged</i>
How anger communicates.	Anger says, "That is wrong?" It is a fundamentally moral reaction. When you are angry, what is happening inside is this: your heart is observing the scene before you and crying out that something you love is being treated unjustly. Judging is a function of love; tolerance is most times a matter of indifference.
How anger makes us relate.	Anger's instinct is to punish and attack whatever (or whoever) it perceives as wrong. Anger is often blind to itself; it has no mirror. Anger makes us feel powerful but this power can retard our ability to relate to others.
How anger motivates.	Anger seeks justice. Anger seeks to protect what it loves and punishes any who harm the beloved; it seeks to reverse the damage. Each of these can bring peace and restoration. Each can also gouge and injure. The fundamental question is this: Is our anger constructively serving God's merciful and redemptive purposes, or is it destructively serving our own selfish agenda? When anger is not dealt with helpfully it ferments into bitterness, depression or shame. Anger more than any other emotion, demands to be satisfied with action.
How to...	
Identify anger	Given that anger demands action in response to your judgement that someone has committed a moral offense, we expect to find anger anywhere we find someone in attack mode. Physically, this usually looks like quickened breathing, flushed face, tensed muscles (perhaps even balled fists), raised voices, abusive words and name-calling, and violence. When you are angry, your body feels tight. Chronic anger develops nearly as many symptoms as fear: hypertension, digestive issues. Habitual anger leads to broken relationships. Anger feels right and noble but is not a presence in which people flourish. There is such a thing as righteous anger and anger in and of itself is not a sin but will often lead to sin.
Examine anger	<i>Why am I angry? I am angry because ...? What wrong am I perceiving? What are the outcomes of my anger?</i> In short, your job in examining your anger is to figure out what kind of judgment are you passing. Once you know what you're mad at and why, you can then begin to think redemptively about how to handle it.
Evaluate anger	If anger boils down to a moral judgement, then the first key matter on which to evaluate your anger is this: Is your moral judgement in this situation valid? Or, put another way, are you upset about what God is upset about? If so, you still face a challenge: how will you seek redemptive justice and avoid the temptation to exact destructive vengeance? Investigate the facts: Am I sure that is what they meant? Or Does this line up with how this person tends to treat me and others in general?
Acting in response to anger	Anger that you act on instinctively, without thinking it through, is so likely to be sinful and godless that you might as well say 'always'. If you want to live out righteous anger you need to slow down. Count to 10. Take a breath. Talk about the matter later when you've cooled down. To name anger rather than spraying it about, is a step of maturity and tends to help you respond to your anger rather than respond in your anger. Ultimately, the best thing you can do about anger in your life is to cultivate humility. Humility empowers the healthy anger that treats others as more important than yourself. Humility protects others while exposing and undercutting the unhealthy anger that enthrones you as judge from a moral high ground only you perceive. What are the earmarks of humility in the face of anger? Humility speaks honestly about what it knows and what it doesn't.

¹ Based on *Untangling Emotions* J. Alisdair Groves & Winston T. Smith p169-182.