



Dan's Divinities
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Coping with Anger

The members of the youth group were talking about what they wanted to do for a living when they became adults. Buddy shared that he wanted to become a law enforcement officer. What a wonderful aspiration! But all the kids told him that was a bad idea. Why? Because they all knew that Buddy had anger issues. He had a very short fuse and when it was lit, he became irrational and threatening. Buddy readily admitted his problem with anger, and we talked about it many times. He traced it back to the fact that his dad had abandoned the family when he was much younger, and Buddy was angry with him. Buddy had no desire to forgive his dad, preferring to nurture his rage. Although he was a wonderful guy most of the time, Buddy had decided to be an angry person and his anger was always ready to emerge.

All of us get angry from time to time. Even Jesus got angry. One time he became so angry that he braided a whip and drove the animals that were being sold for sacrifices out of the temple complex (John 2:13-22). He spilled all the money that the money changers had in their containers and overturned their tables. Can you imagine the ruckus that Jesus created as he cracked the whip over the heads of those animals and, no doubt, shouted at them as he drove them away? Sheep and goats braying in fear, money crashing onto a stone floor and rolling down the steps, men yelling in panic and anger. He led a very active protest! He yelled at them, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (John 2:16) and "'The Scriptures declare, 'My temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!" (Matthew 21:13)

Jesus was angry because people had turned the temple into a corrupt system of commerce that took advantage of people instead of helping them. The Old Testament dictated that only perfect animals could be sacrificed in the temple and each animal had to be inspected by a priest serving in the temple before it could be accepted as a sacrifice. But how many perfect animals are there? Even if you brought in your very best lamb or goat, the priest would find a scar or a defect of some kind. The only animals approved for sacrifice by the priests were

those sold by the temple merchants. The prices for them were astronomical. It is recorded by Josephus, the Roman historian, that one day a respected rabbi who was not on the high priest's payroll ruled that since animals had become so expensive, families could wait until after the birth of their last child and make one sacrifice for all their children. On that day, the price of turtle doves dropped tenfold! Not only were temple prices greatly inflated, one could only pay for the animals with temple money, not with money that had the pagan and idolatrous image of the Roman emperor stamped into it. Of course, the only place you could change your Roman money into temple money was at the money changers' tables in the temple porticoes, the only place where the temple money was legal tender. So, with their monopoly, the money changers could charge almost any exchange rate they wanted. Who were the temple merchants and money changers? They were family members and paying friends of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. How did the Jewish Sanhedrin get their positions? At least in part through what they could pay the high priest who had the authority to appoint them. And the high priest had to pay the Roman governor a tremendous price for his approval and authorization. The temple was supposed to be a place where people could connect with God through their prayers and sacrifices, but it became the mechanism of the rich and powerful to maintain and enrich their positions at the expense of the poor and devout. No wonder Jesus lost his temper and led a ferocious one-man protest!

Jesus got mad about the systemic oppression of the poor and vulnerable by the wealthy and powerful. We call that righteous anger. Our anger is not always so righteous. We get mad when we don't get our way, when other people don't agree with our perspective, when people offend us, and when we are criticized. As our adrenalin flows, the thinking part of our brains shuts down and the reptilian, emotional base of our brains wakes up. We become reactive and aggressive people, ready to fight or flee to protect ourselves. Anger can make us rude, combative, and hard to get along with. We get angry about something that happened at work, but we have to repress our anger because work is not a safe place to express it. So, we go home and take it out on our spouse, our kids, and our pets. If we cannot effectively deal with our anger, whatever the cause, we get depressed and sullen. Sometimes anger blows the lid off the pressure cooker and people express themselves violently. It is the root of family violence, school

shootings, gang violence, drive-by shootings, and our recent insurrection in Washington, D.C.

We all get angry, and we must all learn to cope with our anger effectively if we are to live happy lives as godly disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Skill in coping with anger begins with a willingness to let our thinking brains be aware of our anger. When we get angry, we may need to call a time-out and go for a walk, cooling down enough to allow ourselves to get out of our reptilian, reactionary brains and into our thinking, rational brains. If we can confess our anger to ourselves and to God, that is the first step in dealing with it. As we seek the Lord about our feelings, the Holy Spirit will guide us to effective ways of expressing it. The Spirit may help us to see the validity of another person's views or the understandable reasons for their actions. He might help us to forgive and move on. He could lead us to be an assertive agent of effective change, or he may lead us to confess our wrongs and seek the forgiveness of others. He will teach us to attack issues and not people. Issues are there to be resolved; people are there to be loved and cared for. In our conversations, we can learn to talk about how issues need to be addressed instead of aggressively attacking people involved in the issues. Instead of making a person the object of our anger and attacking them by saying something like, "Why do you always have to . . .", we can learn to say "It upsets me when such and such happens." That helps to take our minds out of the attack mode and into the problem-solving mode. One thing to remember is that our relationships with others are almost always more important than the issues that divide us. It is good to talk about issues and resolve them to whatever extent possible, but there will be times when we just forgive and forget because God has called us to be merciful and loving.