

HOW TO BE GOOD AND ANGRY

Discussion and Study Guide

We are flawed people in relationships with flawed people, living in a fallen world, but with a faithful God. Christ in us will empower us to increasingly engage our fallen planet with the restorative anger of love, the rescuing anger of mercy, and the advocacy anger of justice. May this conference and study guide be instrumental in helping us grow in Christ likeness, reflecting His love and His anger at the same time.

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Section 1: BEING GOOD AND ANGRY

Core Statement: “One of the necessary components of our broken world is anger.

Because if this world is broken, if it’s not the way it’s supposed to be, then it’s right at points to be motivated by anger. Anger is not just a bad thing; anger is also a very good thing, and we better know the difference. God’s grace is not supposed to make us unangry. God’s grace is supposed to make us good **and** angry, at the same time.”

Session Goal: To help people understand the place of anger in our broken world.

The redemptive story (the biblical story) is a story of two angers.

Study and Discussion Questions:

1. Give examples of emotional changes that we witness in everyday life, either in ourselves or in others.
2. What must we understand about our world, if we’re going to understand anger in its horrible form or in its glorious form?
3. What metaphor did Paul use to help us understand this? To what did he compare our world?
4. Explain what theologians mean when they say that we live between the “already” and the “not yet.”

5. What did Paul mean when he said that we live between “grace” and “shalom”?
What does “shalom” entail?

6. The story of the Bible is a narrative, a drama, about anger. What important elements are woven into the narrative?

7. The propositions are the themes of the story formed into generalized truth statements. What does this help us understand?

8. The principles are the themes of the story applied to the situations of daily life. Why is this important?

9. Which passage of Scripture is a good summary of the biblical story?

Application Questions:

1. Think of a time during the past week when you felt your emotions changing in the direction of impatience and anger.

2. Which of the following statements characterized your response?
 - a. I overreacted.
 - b. I was defensive.
 - c. I was irritable.
 - d. I was sarcastic.
 - e. I used a harsh tone.
 - f. I was dismissive.
 - g. I took you for granted.
 - h. I withdrew.
 - i. I avoided the topic.
 - j. I did not listen well.
 - k. I brought up and used something against you from the past
that I had forgiven and promised to never bring up again
 - l. I belittled your opinion.
 - m. I was judgmental.
 - n. Other_____.

3. What was the result? What did I reap?

4. How was that incident an example of “Man’s anger does not work God’s righteous cause”? (James 1:20)

5. Prayerfully consider what God’s righteous cause may have been in that situation.

Section 2: TWO PARALLEL ANGERS

Core Statement: “You see people’s anger; and then you see moments when God is clearly angry, but it’s something good, because God is trying to preserve this world that He has made. The drama of Scripture in a real way is the drama of these two angers living alongside one another, and you just know they’re going to explode in a moment.”

Session goal: To better understand both sides of anger: God’s and ours. God’s righteous anger is the hope of the universe; our unholy anger is our doom.

Study and Discussion Questions:

1. What drives God’s anger?
2. How does Acts 2:22-24 explain how the full anger of people and the full anger of God explode?
3. “The Cross teaches us that anger is the worst thing and the best thing that ever happened.” How do you explain this?

Application Questions:

1. Does God's anger comfort me or scare me? Why?
2. Consider Acts 2:22-24 again. How can this passage comfort me when I am suffering because of the selfishness or unholy anger of other people?
3. What other passages of Scripture emphasize how God accomplishes His purposes even through people who oppose Him and hurt His people?
4. How can Acts 2:22-24 comfort me when I know that I have hurt others because of **my** selfishness and unholy anger?
5. Can you share an example from your own life where you were comforted to know that God is good and angry at the same time?

Section 3: OUR STRUGGLE WITH ANGER

Core Statement: “If you ever want to understand your anger, you have to look this way (inward), because your anger is connected not just to events outside of you; your anger is connected to something going on inside of you. You will never gain ground with your anger unless you get this.”

Session goal: To begin to see that anger is connected to our desires and therefore anger is connected to worship. (Romans 1:25)

Study and Discussion Questions:

1. Although anger may be initiated by something outside of you, by what is it colored, controlled and shaped? What does Luke 6:43-45 reveal?
2. The Bible describes human beings as consisting of two parts: the inner man and the outer man, the immaterial and the material, the spiritual self and the physical body. (Examples: 2 Corinthians 4:16, Matthew 10:28, 1 Corinthians 7:34, James 2:26).
What is the basket term or the summary term that the Bible uses for the inner person? (Mark 7:20-23; Proverbs 4:23)
3. Describe in more detail some of the functions of the inner man, the center of the true you.

Application Questions:

1. Share a time when you desired something good, but it became too important to you and began to rule you. How did it set the agenda for the people in your life or the situation you were in?
2. How did you react when you did not get it? (“Our behavior in any relationship or situation is an attempt to get out of the relationship and situation what is really valuable to us.”)
3. What were the consequences of your reactions?
4. What is your typical mode of punishment when you do not get your way? (Silence, withdrawal, angry words, violence?).
5. Where do you tend to get irritated, frustrated, discouraged, or experience flashes of anger? Do you recognize any themes or patterns?

6. “You can’t change your environment into a perfect one, but you can participate in radical changes inside of yourself.” What is God revealing to you that he wants you to own, because He loves you and wants to change you, so that you can experience the freedom and joy of His rule in your heart? Be specific and ask those in your group to pray for you and hold you accountable. Change is a community project.

Section 5: HORIZONTAL PROBLEM, VERTICAL SOLUTION

Core Statement: “It’s not enough for us as Christians to believe in life after death; we better believe in life before death: a quality of love and peace, a quality of existence in our relationships and situations that would not be possible apart from the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not die just for your future; Jesus Christ died for your here-and-now! Praise Him!”

Session Goal: To learn to love God and place Him in the center of our universe. We cannot keep the 2nd big commandment, if we are not keeping the 1st big commandment first.

Study and Discussion Questions:

1. Paul emphasized the importance of recognizing that anger connects to something inside us. If we do not, he mentioned four things that will happen.
 - a. What will we personalize?
 - b. What will happen to God-given moments of ministry?
 - c. What will be our response?
 - d. For what will we settle? What will we overlook?

2. In Galatians 5:13-15, the apostle Paul exhorts God’s people to serve one another in love and not to indulge the sinful nature. He sums up the entire law in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” How do you make sense of that? Why did he not mention the 1st commandment? Compare with 1 John 3:14; 4:19-21.

3. God doesn't just tell us to stop being angry. What has He provided that makes change possible? How do we appropriate it? What does He say?
See James 4:6-10.

Application Questions:

1. Where this past week have I been irritable? With whom? What was I focusing on?
2. When did I feel discouraged and down? What was I wanting?
3. Who did I talk bad about this week? Whose law did they break, mine or God's? Did I show concern and compassion for them?
4. With whom was I the most demanding? What would serving that person in love have looked like?

Section 6: GOD WANTS YOU TO BE GOOD AND ANGRY

Core Statement: “Our problem is not just that we are angry. Our problem is that we are angry in all the wrong places for all the wrong reasons.”

Session Goal: to move, by God’s grace, from our own self-focused anger to God’s big, beautiful and constructive anger.

Study and Discussion Questions:

1. Which part of the Lord’s Prayer did Paul emphasize that we need to pray, if we are ever going to be free from selfish anger? Compare Matthew 6:10 with Matthew 26:39.
2. What did Jesus’ death provide for us in our struggle with anger? See Galatians 5:24-25 and Romans 6:1-14.
3. What does “big kingdom” anger look like?

Application Questions:

1. Paul said that the evil inside of us connects to the evil outside of us. Where was this dynamic most evident in your life this week?

Dismantling Idols: Learning to Worship the True King

1. Name it. Confess it. “Lord, this is what I have wrapped my heart around.”
(Example: position, possessions, people, power, approval, comfort, security...)

2. Repent. Turn to God. Draw near to Him—James 4:6-10. Spend time with Him.
Talk to Him about your struggles. Write out your prayers.

3. Unmask the idol for what it is. It appears desirous and beautiful, but it is a fraud and worshipping and living for it will only bring destruction. Compare what your idol does for you with what Jesus has done and continues to do for you. Write out a list comparing both lovers. Talk to Jesus about this.

4. Meditate on Isaiah 44:9-23 and Psalm 115. Recognize the excellence of your new King in comparison with your old ruling idol/master.

5. Rejoice in Jesus

- As you rejoice in Jesus, your affection for you old lover/master will gradually decrease and you will be drawn more and more to Him. Spend time daily with Him, meditating on a portion of God's Word. Write down on an index card each day one verse that caught your attention. Carry it with you and reread to yourself at different times during the day. It will keep your mind focused on God and His kingdom.

- It is like getting over an old boyfriend/girlfriend. The more you get to know your true lover, you begin to see all the flaws, selfishness and abuse of your old lover. What used to look like gold and silver was just a cover up for what was underneath-- -just a stump of old dry wood---and you were becoming just like it.

- Remember, rejoicing in Christ as a replacement for idols is a process...be patient...your heart will warm up more and more and you will come alive with joy. The Holy Spirit is your helper, pouring out God's love into your heart. (Romans 5:1-5; Ephesians 1:17-23; 3:15-21))

CASE STUDY: Janet and Jim

I received a call from Janet saying that she is getting weary with Jim and that they have been fighting a lot. “He just doesn’t listen to me anymore. When I ask for something or tell him how I feel, he gets impatient and flairs up. Things are getting worse and I don’t think I can take this much longer. If only he could dialogue with me in a kind way....”

Jim (35) had studied economics in college and his dream was to start his own business just like his father had done, so his dream seemed to come true when he opened up his own Skiing and Sport Goods Store in White Plains. He has been working six, sometimes seven days a week. He is under great pressure to succeed and he is tired of working so much. Janet is alone a lot with their two children (5/ 2 yrs. old) and she is pregnant again. Jim is worried because his business is not producing the profit that he had expected. He was very unhappy when he found out that Janet was pregnant. Finances are a problem.

Janet is worried about their store and makes lots of suggestions about what Jim should be doing to make the business better. She sometimes calls her brother for advice, since he is a very successful businessman. She tries to tell her husband what she and her brother talk about, but he just gets irritated with her advice. They argue a lot and then she withdraws and has no desire to be intimate with Jim. This frustrates him and he thinks that she is punishing him by withholding sex from him.

Lately he has begun to hang out with his guy friends after work, and sometimes if he can get away from the store on Saturday or Sunday, he plays golf with his father at his country club. This really upsets Janet, but he says he needs some downtime---playing golf helps him deal with all the stress from work. Janet is also exhausted, but the kids need her and she just can’t walk away. She has been nagging Jim to please stay home more and help her. They used to go to his parents beach house occasionally, but that has stopped and she misses that.

She is afraid that everything is going to crumble. Then last week she found a Playboy magazine under the seat in his car. When she confronted him about that he became very angry saying, "Well, what's a guy supposed to do? Since you are not willing to meet my needs, this is better than nothing..." She was heart-broken and said, "Well, if you would just come home and be helpful and kind, then it might work, but how can I make love to you if you continue to hurt me and criticize me and leave me alone with the children. This is not what I bargained for when we got married. You just don't understand my love language. I don't think this is going to work."

Janet drags Jim to counseling. They have been discussing divorce, because they don't seem to be able to make things work. Janet was brought up in the church and is in conflict, because she has been taught that God wouldn't want divorce. Yet the fighting is not good for the children. She always wanted them to have a Christian education just like her parents had given to her. They are both hurting and don't know what to do.

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

1. Janet and Jim's behavior reveal a clash of desires, a battle for something that each one craves. They just crave or value different things. Each one's behavior shows their desperate attempt to get what they value most. In view of James 4:1-4, what do you think is ruling Janet's heart? What good thing is ruling Jim's heart? What good desires have morphed into ruling desires?

2. If they do not know that each other's anger is connected to something inside of them, they will
 - ▶ personalize what is not personal.
 - ▶ turn God-given moments of ministry into moments of anger.
 - ▶ be adversarial in their responses.
 - ▶ settle for quick situational solutions that don't get to the heart of what is really going on.

Where do you see this happening in their lives?

3. Consider the following statement: “The evil inside of me connects to the evil outside of me.” Where do you observe this dynamic with Jim or Janet? Where are they blaming external things or situations for their responses?

d. For whose kingdom are they living? Are they angry about the things that God cares about, “big kingdom anger”?

e. God shows us His love with His restorative anger of love, His rescuing anger of mercy, and His advocacy anger of justice. How might Jim and Janet’s responses be different if they served one another in love? How can they be good **and** angry at the same time? What would that look like? How can they be active participants in what God wants to do in each other’s lives, rescuing and restoring one another for God’s glory?

f. How can the church community help support and encourage them?