

Graham Bretherick brilliantly combines scripture with his long-standing experience as a pastor and Christian psychologist. Each point is backed by apt illustrations. He is a man of the heart, communicating the gems he has discovered with such great empathy that you are filled with hope.

Stanley Mehta

Gateway Ministries International; apostolic leader of the Salt and Light churches in India

The material in this book has been taught over the last few years in Canada, U.K., India and Kenya. Graham has been used mightily to train leaders and counsellors in our church in Nairobi. Their understanding and skills have been sharpened as they applied and used the principles in this book and I highly recommend it.

Bishop Dr John B Masinde

Kenya

Since the early days of our conversations about anger, I have incorporated Graham's teachings on anger into my practice. I have observed how his teachings and techniques open people's eyes very quickly. I have observed the sense of relief on each face, and listened to the comments that a weight has been lifted.

Graham provides a critical path to recovery from life's hurts through his tremendous presentation on forgiveness. I would strongly encourage you to read and absorb the

concepts and perspectives that he shares. As you do, I know that you will experience the freedom that so many have gained because they can look at their emotions from a more positive and constructive perspective.

Dr Randy Johnson

Executive Director of Master's Counselling Services, Calgary, Alberta

Graham is a gifted untangler. He's passionate about dismantling barriers in the lives of people and helping them to discover new levels of freedom from past wounds. Over the years I have heard many testimonies from people who attest to the effectiveness of his teaching and counselling. He walks his talk.

Healing Life's Hurts brings a fresh perspective to a familiar theme. The book uses ancient pathways of truth from the Bible to address modern life issues. I heartily endorse Graham's book. Like his counselling and seminars, it will produce a harvest of freedom.

Dr Michael L Hastings

Pastoral Team Leader, Northside Christian Fellowship, Lethbridge, Alberta

HEALING LIFE'S HURTS

Make your anger work for you

GRAHAM BREThERICK

MONARCH
BOOKS

Oxford, UK & Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

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It is difficult (probably impossible) to give credit to everyone who has influenced me in the writing of this book. In my early years, I read considerably. I was always the student, looking to learn, because I realized that I was on a journey of discovery in my attempts to help others. Then came the day when I realized how much I needed help myself. That was when God brought Duane Harder, my pastor, back into my life. Over a six-year period, God used Duane to help me find real answers to the questions I had about my own life. In that process of re-learning, I began a study of the Scriptures that changed the way I approached learning. To a large degree I stopped reading other authors and began to ask the Holy Spirit to teach me from his Word. That is how this book came to be. However, I do want to acknowledge my thanks to all those authors and the people in my life who have had an impact on my overall thinking. But I especially want to acknowledge my deep gratitude to Duane and Marva Harder for their inestimable input into my life and writing. I do not know where I would be today without them.

I also have much to be thankful for in my church family, Northside Christian Fellowship of Lethbridge. Some of us have been together for thirty years, and in that journey we have shared together conflict, forgiveness and love many times. To my fellow elders, Mike Hastings, Doug Scales and Craig Webber – thank you for your faithfulness in working out differences, which has led to a development of character in me that would not have been possible without you. I am also grateful for the many

close relationships with my fellow pastors in the 'Church of Lethbridge'. Our bond of unity has been made possible through forgiveness and reconciliation over many years.

I also want to acknowledge my gratefulness to my parents for their Godly input into the formative years of my life. I was privileged to grow up in a 'normal' home (whatever that is) and to benefit from being trained in Godly ways from my earliest days. To my parents, Ralph and Marjorie, I cannot say 'Thank you' enough times. You are receiving your reward in heaven.

My siblings, Judy, Grant, Ross, Lynne and Elaine, also contributed significantly to my development and learning. To them I also owe a debt of gratitude. To this day, when we get together (with their spouses and families), we still enjoy wonderful relationships and a bond of love that is the result of the love sown in our home by our parents. A special thanks to my twin brother, Grant, who has accepted me all my life and still believes in me to this day.

To my own family, I also wish to express the inexpressible. How can I thank you enough? Much of what I have learned in the crucible of life was formed in the daily family life that we have all shared together. So to Sam, Sarah, Andy, Nathan and Caleb – thank you for your love, patience, forgiveness and acceptance of an imperfect father working out his anger and forgiveness in our home.

To my wonderful and beautiful wife, Sherry, I cannot say enough. No one has taught me more about love and forgiveness than you. Today I am more in love with you than at any other point in our marriage. Sherry, you and I have learned all about anger and forgiveness together, and I want to publicly acknowledge how grateful I am to God for the life we share. So much of what I teach to others today has been learned in the day-to-day reality of

our marriage. So to you, Sherry, I dedicate this book, and continually offer you my love and loyalty.

The person who has had the most significant influence in my life, without question, has been Jesus Christ. To truly understand forgiveness, one must be forgiven by God himself. To this end, Jesus came to live and die. And I have experienced his forgiveness countless times. My prayer is that every reader might also know the personal forgiveness of the God of the Universe, in the person of his Son, Jesus. May the Holy Spirit bring each of you the revelation of truth from God's Word and from this book.

Foreword

Through years of experience and a sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit, Graham Bretherick has been able to help others walk into new levels of freedom in Christ. This book is an expression of his life's message. His training in theology has helped him filter out the humanism from his postgraduate work in psychology and present a biblical alternative to the issues of the soul.

Our friendship with Graham goes back many years – in fact we considered him part of our family while he was doing summer work in an area where we were pastoring. His integrity, passion for truth and love of the Lord have made him a great asset to the church of Jesus Christ. Graham writes out of who he is.

Both my wife and I pray that as you read this book, you will find the One whose name is Counsellor and that, in finding him, you will be set free.

Duane Harder

Preface

The journey towards writing this book began several years ago. At an international church leaders' meeting in England in 1993, my wife Sherry and I were given a prophecy (a word of encouragement) by a man named Bryn Franklin. In this word to us, I was told that I would be given keys that would unlock certain doors. Bryn expressed it this way: 'I felt there were skills that God wanted to give you in the training and in the development in the area of counsel, in specific counsel, specialized counsel – that God would give you some keys in that area.'

Shortly after that conference, returning to work as a psychologist at Crossroads Counselling Centre in Lethbridge, I remember being challenged to look for real answers to the issues that my clients presented to me day after day. A principal concern was the way past hurts held people back from getting on with their present lives. Many people seemed captured by their bitterness. I needed real answers to see them set free. It was clear that I was dealing with a lot of buried anger in people, some of it buried for a long time. This anger directly affects how they solve present problems.

My spiritual director and pastor, Duane Harder, continually encouraged me to look in the Scriptures for answers to the problems and dilemmas I was facing. So, I began looking up the word 'anger' in its various forms in the Bible. After printing all the references from my computer concordance, I began examining the concept of anger in the Bible. This process revolutionized my thinking. God provides answers from the Bible to the

personal problems we all face. His real answers could bring about real change in people's lives. Along with Sherry's daily intercession, I saw not only a remarkable difference in the counselling cases I was handling, but also a definite increase in successful outcomes.

One day, in a discussion with Dr Dick Dewert, President of The Miracle Channel in Lethbridge, I was asked to consider recording my anger workshop on videotape. As a result, *Healing Life's Hurts* was professionally developed and marketed through The Miracle Channel. As I continued to travel, conducting workshops as well as selling videotapes and DVDs, I was frequently asked for this material in book form. The Holy Spirit kept nudging me to listen to what was being asked of me, and so, with a sense that God wanted this material in print, I agreed to write a book. I trust God to use the material he gave me to help readers find greater freedom in Christ. This prayer is continually on my heart.

Introduction

Jim and Georgina were not getting along at all. (All the names and some of the circumstances mentioned in these stories and counselling references have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the clients I have counselled.) They were concerned, not only for their marriage, but for the effect their ongoing conflict had on their two children. They were leaders in the Christian community and, ironically, their calling was helping others with marriage problems. But with their own marriage in turmoil, they didn't know how to help themselves. When they asked to see Sherry and me, we prayed to see if the Lord wanted us to counsel them. After a week of praying, we felt that God had directed us to see them.

As we listened to the hurt and anger each felt toward the other, I knew it wasn't just the accumulation of fifteen years of marriage that had caused all the hurts. Each of them had come into the marriage with a load of pain from their own families. I explained that the process I use in marriage counselling is, first, to remove baggage from the past, then to solve the presenting issues they brought as a couple. Sherry and I met with Georgina first. We helped her untangle confusion and hurt from her past. At the same time, I met with Jim alone to hear his family background. As I often found, the perceptions he had of himself as a man were filled with distortions born of unresolved hurts from his father. His view of women was also distorted because he had witnessed how badly his father had treated his mother. That left him with a sense that women were not truly valued. Further, he was

angry with his mother for her treatment of him as a boy, hanging onto him emotionally as he grew into manhood. He needed women, yet was afraid of them.

As we worked through the hurt and pain from the past, they both acknowledged the anger that had come from past hurts. As Jim and Georgina forgave their parents and others, we saw remarkable changes in their hearts. Jim took ownership of marital issues for which he had blamed Georgina. And Georgina, who seemed emotionally fragile and easily hurt, became willing to accept her part in the hurts of the marriage. Both of them saw the distorted view they held toward each other. They each began to understand and value their partner's marriage role. The learning curve they gained in solving their own marriage issues helped them significantly in working through other people's marriage problems.

Jim and Georgina's story is similar to other stories I have heard for years. The deep hurts within each person were hindering their perceptions of how to deal with their present marital issues. In fact, for many people, the hurts of life seldom get healed. As a result, hurts accumulate in their souls over a period of years. Gradually the 'emotional tank' gets full of pain. Then, after accumulating one too many hurts, they reach a crisis! The overload sends them crashing. They finally realize they need help to overcome their excessive emotional baggage.

All hurt, or emotional pain, represents danger. As we will see in the following pages, danger produces a natural reaction of anger. That is the way God has made us. To deal with the hurts of life, we must deal with stored anger in our emotions. To release buried anger, we must use the only key we have been given by God: forgiveness. So, in a nutshell, hurt produces anger and accumulated anger forms bitterness. Bitterness destroys our soul like cancer

destroys the body. The only answer to this 'cancerous' bitterness is radical forgiveness. In this book, I want to take you on a journey of discovery: from hurt to anger to forgiveness and ultimately to freedom. May the Holy Spirit reveal the truth of his Word to each person reading these words.

So let's begin the process by exploring biblical truth about anger. Some of these truths about anger from the Scriptures may surprise you, because most of us carry misconceptions about anger and about the purpose for which anger is given to us.

Part 1

Anger's Purpose and Value

Chapter 1

Misconceptions of Anger

Because we have many and varied experiences of anger and hurts, we develop a false perception of what anger is. Most of our experiences have led us to believe that anger is bad, for this one simple reason: We confuse anger itself with the expression of anger. In the workshops that I have conducted over the years, I often ask my audience to define anger. A typical definition is this: Anger is an outburst of emotion, a fit of temper or someone expressing rage. Most people have great misconceptions of what anger really is. These misconceptions can be divided into four categories:

1. Anger is negative and destructive

Most of us don't like our experiences of anger expression, and therefore we think anger is bad. When, in our childhood, our parents mishandled their anger and yelled at us, hit us or punished us wrongly, we concluded that anger is bad. Isn't that our usual response to anger? Most of us have grown up with this kind of expression of anger in our families. During university graduate studies I was taught that anger is a neutral emotion. However, I learned through biblical study that anger is not primarily an emotion, although it certainly has emotional expression. In fact, anger is neither bad, nor neutral, but good. Because

anger is often expressed in abuse, whether physical, emotional, verbal, sexual or spiritual, we think of anger as bad and therefore, negative and destructive. We need a major shift in our thinking about anger.

2. We are afraid of anger and think of it as our enemy

Because we perceive anger as negative, we fear and avoid it, in the same way we avoid angry people. This resulting view of anger commonly causes people to 'bury' it. In psychological terms, we say that anger is repressed or suppressed (repression is an unconscious process; suppression is a conscious process). Sometimes, when people are angry and are confronted by others about their anger, they deny being angry because it is generally not acceptable. Everyone has experienced this many times.

For example, we are at work. A colleague expresses a joking comment but it comes out as a derogatory statement. We laugh it off as we walk away but the statement hits like an arrow. In the busyness of our working day, we dismiss the comment (repress it) and get on with the day. Or, so we think. But our heart has been wounded and we carry this buried anger around throughout the day. Interestingly, the sarcasm we have just received from our colleague has probably come from his buried anger. So, we too pass the anger on to others again and again.

This process causes us to think of anger as an enemy. We do whatever we can to avoid it. We believe that anger is best kept under control. We try to manage our anger or skilfully protect ourselves from the anger of others. This idea of control is a myth, as you will see in our third misconception.

3. Anger should be totally controlled

Anger is often a difficult and confusing concept to understand. Because we don't understand it, we try to control it. We think that the best we can do with anger is to manage it. Managing anger expression is not wrong, but when we try to manage something we don't understand we often end up repressing it. It is like trying to put a fence around a vicious dog, thinking a fence will control it. When the dog gets frustrated enough, he will find a way to escape the fenced yard. When we attempt to control our anger, we are controlling the expression of anger without understanding why anger is there in the first place. Often, our attempt to manage anger is actually a way of burying it. It is correct that anger expression needs managing. And yes, anger expression can be managed properly, but that process will be discussed later.

We need to use anger for the purpose that God intended. That means learning how to manage the anger we express. But it also means much more. We must learn how to remove all the buried anger in us caused by the hurts of life, which have accumulated over years. In many relationships, we have unresolved issues that we carry around endlessly. Our failure to understand anger is the root of many destructive relationships, because we have learned to bury anger rather than to use it. Many of the hurtful comments we make to others come from our stored anger. Our usual control of anger is a vow not to say or do it again. Managing anger in this way is not effective in solving problems.

4. Our problems with anger are unique

Our fourth misconception about anger is that our struggles with anger are unique to us. Most of us are reluctant to

talk about our feelings of anger. Imagine sitting at a social gathering and saying to someone you hardly know, 'So how have you handled your anger today?' Anger is a taboo subject, like death or sex. Anger is difficult to discuss, even with those close to you. Anger is a shame issue for us. We are ashamed to admit that we have angry feelings. When I have travelled to other countries to do workshops, I have found that the issue of anger is a problem in every culture. Handling anger is a concern for every family and individual around the world.

Anger expression is also generational. We learn to handle anger largely by the way our family handled anger. We express anger according to the way we have been raised. My father passed to me some of his wrong ways of expressing anger. He didn't do it intentionally. But the truth is, I learned how to express my anger by being the recipient of his anger. Of course, I passed my mistakes in handling anger on to my children. We all learn to use anger through past experiences. Yet we think that anger issues are unique to ourselves or to our family. But that is simply not true. The ways we express anger are common throughout the world.

Let's begin our discussion of anger by attempting to establish a biblical definition.

Chapter 2

Defining Anger

What is anger?

Despite the bad press anger has received, it is actually our friend, not our enemy. Anger is not bad or even neutral, but good. Anger is a gift from God (Judges 14:19). Anger enables us to defend ourselves against danger (Genesis 31:36). In fact, God himself gets angry when his children are hurt by others or diminished in any way. We refer to this as vicarious anger (Exodus 15:6–8). God’s anger is expressed against sin, the devil and any enemy of ours. God is angry whenever his enemies try to hurt any of his children. God’s expression of anger against our sin occurs because he knows how destructive sin is to his children. (Sin is defined as not living up to God’s standard of holiness or perfection, which the Bible sets as the benchmark.) Sin is not only wrong, it also hurts us and destroys us. Because sin is destructive, it calls forth anger from God (1 Kings 11:9). If we are sinning against others, we often feel God’s anger toward us for our destructive acts.

Parents certainly can understand God’s perspective. Don’t you as parents find anger rising if someone tries to harm your children? We may even experience greater anger when our children are attacked than when we ourselves are attacked. I remember when our oldest son Sam, who was about nine at the time, was playing in the playground behind our house. I walked out the

back gate with my father-in-law, who was visiting, to see Sam. Walking past the trees that hid the play structure, I noticed an older boy sitting on the apparatus, spitting on Sam's head. Fortunately, my father-in-law was there to restrain me when immediate anger gripped me. I was ready to release unrestrained anger at this bully for the way he was treating my son.

The anger we feel when our children are under attack is from God, and is designed to protect us and our families from danger. Without anger to protect us, we would be hurt many times over and would have no means to defend ourselves. A person without the capacity to express or use anger to defend himself is victimized repeatedly.

Anger is from God

All human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We carry the likeness of God in our genes, albeit imperfectly because of the Fall. Within each of us is a built-in sense of justice and righteousness. We are keenly aware of someone violating our rights or treating us unfairly. The Creator himself has established these inherent rights in us. They express his design for our socialization and well-being. These rights include the right to justice, the right to dignity and honour, the right to meaningful purpose, and the right to act responsibly. When our rights have been violated, anger from God stirs an 'anger energy' in us to right the wrong. This authority to correct the wrong and defend the right is established by God in every human being.

In 2 Samuel 12, King David was confronted by the prophet Nathan about his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba. Nathan wisely told David a story about a rich man who took advantage of a poor man by slaughtering his one and

only pet lamb for a supper for himself and his travelling guest. Verses 5–6 say, ‘David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”’ Even though it was David who had sinned against God, the inherent sense of righteousness in David evoked his angry response when he heard this story from Nathan the prophet.

This same authority is given to parents to train, discipline and, when needed, punish their children. God defines the boundaries of right and wrong. God passes on his authority to parents, the church and the government to teach and maintain right and wrong. These boundaries, established by God’s Word, help protect you and me from infringement on our rights. Proverbs 15:31–33 says, ‘He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding. The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honour.’

Anger is good

We know anger is good is because God himself expresses anger, yet he has no evil in him. He cannot be the sinless God of the Bible and have evil in himself. Because God is perfect in his holiness, the anger coming from God must be holy and right. We much prefer to think of God as ‘love’. He is love, of course. However, God’s anger in Scripture is expressed as much as his love. Anger and love are not mutually exclusive. We know we can be angry with the person we love the most. God expresses both anger and love toward his children, and both expressions are good.

We can see this in Psalm 90:11–14: ‘Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Relent, O Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.’ In Jeremiah 30:24 we also see the Lord using his anger to accomplish his loving purposes for his people, even when we don’t understand it: ‘The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand this.’ God always uses his anger to benefit his divine purposes.

God commands us to be angry

There is another reason why the Bible teaches that anger is good. Anger is good because God commands us to get angry, yet not sin in the expression of anger. Ephesians 4:26 tells us: ‘Be angry and yet do not sin’ (NASB). The Greek text is written in the present tense and the imperative mood. (The present tense in Greek means continuous action; the imperative mood is the voice of command.) This verse is a command to be obeyed continuously. Literally translated, it would read like this: ‘I command you to be continuously angry [as needed] and yet continuously not to sin in your anger.’ Why would God command us to be angry? Because he knows that we need anger to do what is right, and especially to stand against the enemy. Scripture never tells us to repress, suppress, deny or bury anger. Scripture demands that we use anger properly to accomplish God’s purposes on the earth. We have been trained throughout our lives that anger is wrong. And we have been told to stop being angry, or even worse, to be

ashamed of anger. Therefore, we automatically repress or bury many of our angry feelings. We simply do not understand God's purpose for anger.

God also commands us to forgive

The Bible also makes it clear that when our 'rights' have been violated and someone hurts us, we must also work through a process of forgiveness. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23–24: 'Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.' When we forgive our offender, we participate in Christ's redemptive process. We also verify that the offender's needs (from which the hurt derived) are important too. So, in forgiveness, we not only identify and accept our response to the hurt, but also we actively participate with Jesus in the redemptive healing of the person who caused the hurt. The Bible teaches a radical view of forgiveness. Matthew 6:14–15 says: 'For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.'

Forgiveness is not only for our well-being, but also for the healing of the nations. Only when we grasp the enormity of the debt from which we have been forgiven by God, can we become aware of how much and how often we wrong God and others. Christ's forgiveness is not just prescriptive, it is redemptive. He does not merely say, 'I forgive you', but he commits himself to our ongoing development. We are commanded to forgive in the same manner. We will have much more to say about forgiveness later in the book, but for now this helps establish the

crucial nature of forgiveness in the Bible's discussion of anger and rights.

In order to further understand the Bible's view of anger, we need to get a clear definition of what anger actually is.

A definition of anger: A physiological response to danger

At its most basic level, anger can be defined as 'energy in our bodies designed to protect us from danger'. Here is how I arrived at this definition of anger. One day, when I was searching the Scriptures for answers for dealing with anger in relationships, I read this phrase a number of times: 'he burned with anger'. As I read the story in 1 Samuel 11:1-6, I saw something for the first time:

Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, 'Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you.' But Nahash the Ammonite replied, 'I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel.' The elders of Jabesh said to him, 'Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you.' When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, 'What is wrong with the people? Why are they weeping?' Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said. When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger.

Saul had just become the first king of Israel. He was not

well established as the ruling monarch yet. Israel's enemies harassed them at will. One enemy was the Ammonites, whose king was a bully. As Saul was walking from his fields one day, he met some people who were weeping loudly. He asked them what was wrong. Notice that when Saul heard the news, 'the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger'. God's power on Saul was expressed in his 'burning with anger'. God put his power into Saul. And Saul, motivated by this 'anger energy' from God, rallied the people to defeat this bullying king, winning the battle against the Ammonites.

Burning with anger

Notice the connection between 'the Spirit of God came upon him in power' and 'he burned with anger'. God energized Saul with power, using anger as the source of energy. Think about my definition of anger – energy in our bodies designed to protect us from danger. When you burn something, what happens? Energy is released in the form of heat and light. This phrase 'burned with anger' describes anger exactly. It is 'energy' in our bodies given by God to release power for protection from our enemies.

Interestingly, the words 'anger' and 'danger' are similar to each other in their etymology. (Only one letter differs between the two words.) The word 'danger' is defined as 'exposure to harm or evil'. The word 'anger' means 'the power to harm or protect'. Anger, of course, can be used either negatively or positively. But God intended us to use anger positively as 'energy' to protect us from danger. Anger is energy or power in our bodies that gives us strength for protection for ourselves or for others.

Walking down the back alley

Another illustration illuminates my definition. Suppose that one night you decide to go to a local café for a takeaway coffee. It's dark outside. You think to yourself, 'I should probably go by the well-lit route, but it's late and I'm in a hurry to get back home.' So you walk down a back alley to get to the café. On your way back through the darkened alley, with your drink in your hand, you sense something is not right. The apprehension you sense is a form of fear: a warning signal that danger may be lurking. (Fear is the emotional signal that warns us of the possibility of danger.) You think you hear something, so you strain to see if there is danger, but you see nothing. Suddenly, someone jumps out from behind a fence with a big knife and says, 'Give me your money' (or maybe your coffee!).

At this point, the fear signal has pushed the 'anger button', getting you ready for action. If fear has not completely immobilized you, anger will energize your body for action. At that point, a number of changes will occur in you, automatically. Your heart rate will increase. Your respiration rate will increase. Your skin temperature will increase or decrease, depending on the need of the moment. Your sweat glands will activate. Your muscles will tense. Your digestive system will shut down. Your mouth will go dry. Your pupils will enlarge. Blood will flow to your extremities (hands and feet). Various glands will activate to release hormones into your body.

These changes are autonomic (involuntary). In a split second, without thinking about it, your body will be ready for action. At that moment you will make an instantaneous decision for 'flight or fight'. Do you use this energy of anger to fight the attacker or do you run away

faster than you have ever run before? The energy of anger works to protect you from danger.

A medical perspective

I asked a good friend of mine, who is a medical doctor, to describe this anger reaction in the body from a medical viewpoint. Dr Mark Musk described it this way:

When we experience a strong emotional response like fear or rage, our body prepares for the 'flight or fight' response. Initially, the hypothalamus in the brain is activated through our perception of the environment; then, signals transmit through the reticular formation of the brainstem and into the spinal cord. The activation of the spinal cord causes massive sympathetic discharge at the nerve level, and hormone release. Hormones, like acetylcholine and norepinephrine, act primarily at the local level in tissues, while other hormones, including epinephrine, dopamine, corticosteroids, endorphins and glucagon act systemically. The result is increased blood flow to active muscles, an increase in blood glucose, free fatty acid concentrations and increased rates of cellular metabolism throughout the body. Our respiratory rate and heart rate increases and our pupils dilate to focus quicker. Our blood flow is shunted away from the gastrointestinal tract and kidneys. The reticular formation has a lower threshold for activation that leads to a reinforced alert or arousal rate, preparing the mind and body for action. In case of injury the blood clots more easily and blood vessels in the skin constrict during the response to limit bleeding from potential wounds. The truly amazing thing about the human body's response is the precision and the array of signals that prepares us for action.

When I read this technical, medical description of the body's response to stress, I thanked the Lord for how fearfully and wonderfully we are made!

A mother's anger energy

Some years ago, in a magazine on stress I read a true story about a woman who was watching her young son playing in the front yard of their house. He was playing with a little toy fire engine. The fire engine got away from him and went down the sloped driveway, heading for the street. The three-year-old chased his toy while the mother, watching from the window, gasped with concern. Just then, a van rounded the corner at high speed. The driver saw the little child heading out onto the street. He swerved to miss him and hit a telephone pole. The pole was knocked on top of the child's legs. Anger erupted in the mother at the van driver's carelessness. In the panic of the moment, she ran out to rescue her child. Without thinking, she lifted the telephone pole up to move it from her son's legs.

How did she have the strength to lift it? Was it fear or anger that energized her? It was the anger, aroused by danger to her child, that energized her to lift the heavy pole, saving her child's legs. We sometimes call this energy an 'adrenaline rush'. Without anger energy, she would not have been able to lift it. We probably wouldn't realize that this amazing strength came from her anger. But God intended anger to be used to protect us from danger. When danger occurs, the 'anger button' automatically signals us and we are energized to deal with the situation.

Danger to your self-esteem

Here is another illustration of anger. The previous illustrations refer to physical danger that arouses anger, but many other dangers are not physical in nature. Suppose you go to an office party. As you enjoy chatting with various colleagues, one of your office-mates sits beside you. You know he has a grudge against you, but this is a social occasion and you want to be friendly.

As the conversation continues, he becomes increasingly sarcastic and derogatory toward you. Because you are at a party, other people are part of the conversation. You keep your thoughts to yourself. You don't retaliate with sarcasm. But inside, you are aware that something is changing in your emotions. You are starting to 'burn'!

If we could test your body measurements at that moment, we would find your heart rate and respiration rate increased. Your muscles have tensed, you are perspiring and adrenaline is pumped into your system. In other words, your 'anger button' has been triggered. (It is probably not at the same level as in the back alley, but you are angry, nevertheless.) Even though you decline to express anger to this colleague because you want to avoid a scene, anger nevertheless has energized your body. In fact, you may be such a nice person that you are unaware that you are angry. But you are. Why? Because your office-mate's derogatory comments are dangerous to your self-esteem. His words are destructive to your emotional health and well-being. The inherent worth and value that God placed in you at your conception is being attacked.

The experience is similar to the back alley where you were threatened with a knife. But sarcasm is not as obvious a danger as the threat in the alley. Because you have been socialized not to retaliate in public, you will

repress the anger, denying your angry feelings. However, when you leave that party you will feel something in your body – a tension that you did not have when you came. That tension is anger. The physiological response may be less dramatic, less noticeable, but anger has arisen in you for protection. God made you this way. Every time you experience danger or perceive danger, your body is energized through anger.

Anger and anger expression

Our confusion in understanding anger arises from our inability to distinguish between what anger is and how anger is expressed. This is a very important distinction! Most people think of anger in terms of its expression, which explains why anger is so often defined as rage. Anger, at its root, is 'energy' in our bodies, given by God to protect us from danger. Anger expression, however, becomes a more complex process. Anger expression is affected not only by the current issue that triggered it, but also by the accumulated anger in us over a period of years. It is very important to make a clear distinction between anger itself, and anger expression.

Let's look at 1 Samuel 20:28–34, a Scripture passage that distinguishes between anger and anger expression:

But the next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, 'Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?'

Jonathan answered, 'David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. He said, "Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favour in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers."

That is why he has not come to the king's table.'

Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan [burned against Jonathan – NASB] and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!'

'Why should he be put to death? What has he done?' Jonathan asked his father. But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David. Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

David and Saul

In the context of this story, David became a national hero in Israel because he had killed Goliath. Saul took David into his family and gave his daughter, Michal, to him for his wife. This previously unheard-of shepherd boy now ate his meals at the royal court. But as time went on, because of his insecurity, Saul felt threatened by David's popularity. (The more insecure we are, the more we perceive situations as dangerous to us.) Even David's close relationship with Jonathan became a threat to Saul. Both David and Jonathan were aware of the danger to David. Since Saul had already attempted to kill David with his spear on two different occasions, David thought that eating with the king was dangerous to his health. David and Jonathan developed an excuse for David to miss this meal. David planned to visit his father in Bethlehem for a

family celebration. But Saul saw through this ruse and his anger flared up at Jonathan.

Saul exploded in rage toward Jonathan, his son, because he felt threatened by David. He felt that Jonathan was himself being duped by David in giving up his right of succession to the throne. Saul's anger was so out of control that he even tried to kill his own son with a spear. Notice Jonathan's response. He too became angry because his father's anger was a danger to him and to his friendship with David. But Jonathan refused to use his anger to dishonour his father by retaliating against him. Instead he used his anger to remove himself from the danger at the dinner table. He carried out his plan to save his friend, David. The injustice of Saul's treatment of David caused anger to rise in Jonathan. This anger energized Jonathan to risk his life to save David's. That is using anger appropriately. Anger can be expressed either destructively or constructively. It is our choice. But anger itself is good when it is used as God intended – to protect us or others from danger.