Anger

May 10, 2020

Your blood boils. Your cheeks and forehead feel hot. You grit your teeth. Your vision narrows and you begin seeing everything with a fire-red tint. Okay, maybe that last part isn’t exactly true. But everyone understands what it feels like to be angry.

Anger is an odd emotion. Not because anger in itself is odd, but we don’t seem to respond to anger like we do other emotions. It is often one of the few emotions we feel ashamed to experience. And it shouldn’t be like that.

Anger is a very real, very natural response to sour circumstances around us, and it is often accompanied by other very real emotions like embarrassment, grief, shock, hurt, and disappointment. It often causes us to react harshly and irrationally -- which is where some of the shame comes from. Because of this, we often try to hide our anger and don’t want to admit when we feel it.

But anger is normal. It is okay to be angry without causing emotional or physical pain. God experiences anger (2 Kings 22:17). Many Psalms were written out of anger (Psalm 13:1-2, Psalm 44:24, Psalm 89:46, and more). Jesus got angry in a temple (Matthew 21:12-13).

Fred Rogers was superb at conveying the importance of feelings and how to deal with them. He talked about anger quite a bit...

Mr. Rogers quotes:

“Confronting our feelings and giving them appropriate expression always takes strength, not weakness. It takes strength to acknowledge our anger, and sometimes more strength yet to curb the aggressive urges anger may bring and to channel them into nonviolent outlets. It takes strength to face our sadness and to grieve and to let our grief and our anger flow in tears when they need to. It takes strength to talk about our feelings and to reach out for help and comfort when we need it.”

“It does give you a good feeling to know that there’s something that you can do to help you become the master of the mad that you feel, and not have to hurt yourself, or anybody else.”

(Mister Rogers show)

*What do you do with the mad that you feel* -- Song in Mister Rogers show -- “What a good feeling to feel like this, and know that the feeling is really mine. Know that there’s something deep inside that helps us become what we can.”

God doesn’t want us to bottle our anger up. He wants to hear about it. He wants us to approach Him in our anger and pray to Him about it. He, more than anyone else, can understand our emotions.

Of course, there is a balance that must be achieved when it comes to our anger. In James 1:19-20, we are reminded to “be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry…” There is no harm in feeling angry, but how we respond to our anger -- how we “master our mad” -- will display our wisdom, patience, and show how we honor Christ. Even though Jesus got angry, it was very infrequent. Instead of picking out the few moments He did experience anger, maybe it would be better for us to look at all the times He *could have* gotten angry, but didn’t.

The anger you feel is not wrong. It’s not shameful. But we should all consider both how often we get angry, and how we respond when we are angry. Our first outlet should always be to God in our anger. His presence will calm us and His listening ears will hear us.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. When is the last time you felt angry about something? What made you angry? How did you respond to that anger?
2. Do you ever feel bad for being angry? Why do you think we tend to “shame” people for being angry?
3. What is an appropriate way for you to respond to the anger that you feel? What is the first thing you can do when you feel angry about something?
4. Read any of the Psalms listed above (or all of them, or more if you can find them!). Why do you think it is important for us to have Psalms written out of anger? What does that teach us about anger?
5. How can your family create an environment that is safe to share feelings of anger? Again, we don’t want to justify actions we take out of anger, but we want to be able to acknowledge it and respond to it appropriately – it’s easier to do that when you have the support of family and friends who can listen when you are angry.
6. Read James 1:19-20. How can we be “slow to anger”? How do you “master the mad you feel”? When it comes to anger, this devotion is talking about balance really. How do you maintain that balance in your family?