

CHAPTER 9 -Pressing Past Anger and Unforgiveness

Do you ever get angry? Of course you do; we all do. God never tells us not to feel anger. He says, "Be ye angry, and sin not" ([Ephesians 4:26 KJV](#)). We may feel anger, and that is important, but it is how we process our anger that is most important. It might seem at first that anger has nothing to do with approval addictions, but when we look at the root of excessive anger issues, they almost always find their seed in earlier problems. Anger certainly can be just another facet of our struggle with acceptance. I have found that many people who become frequently angry have a root of insecurity in their life. Those who are easily offended and touchy are insecure. They must be treated good to feel good about themselves. In some ways they expect to be treated badly because down deep inside they feel bad about themselves. However, when they are it angers them because what they feared about themselves has been confirmed, at least in their minds.

The word *anger* is one letter removed from the word *danger*. God's Word tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger (See [Ephesians 4:26 KJV](#)). When we stay angry, we give the devil a foothold in our life (See [v. 27](#)). We open a door for him to work. Most of the ground gained by Satan in the Christian's life is gained through bitterness, resentment, and [unforgiveness](#). People who easily fly into a rage always make a bad landing. When our emotions are out of control, so is our life. Anger makes our mouth work faster than our mind. We end up saying and doing things we are sorry for later.

God promises His children a blessed and abundant life, if they obey His commandments. Staying angry and harboring unkind feelings toward others is disobedience. We must realize sustained anger is sin. If we don't look at it for what it is, we may be tempted to hang onto it. William Seeker, a seventeenth-century pastor, said, "He that would be angry and not sin, must be angry at nothing but sin." Be angry at the sin of anger, and you won't be tempted to keep it.

In several of the books I have written I have included a chapter on anger. Although as a writer I strive to present fresh material, this is a subject that cannot be ignored. We must be quick to forgive. We must deal properly with the emotion of anger. If we do not, the consequences are devastating.

A wounded person cannot receive emotional healing while remaining angry. God commands us to forgive as freely as He has forgiven us (See [Ephesians 4:32](#)).

In this life we must be willing to be very generous with forgiveness. It is one thing we usually need to give away, at least to some degree, every day.

"IT ISN'T FAIR"

When we have been mistreated, it seems totally unfair to just forgive those who have hurt us. We feel someone needs to pay for what has happened to us. When we hurt, we want to place blame. We want justice! We need to remember God is just (See Deuteronomy 32:4). His Word promises He will eventually make everything right that is wrong, if we will only trust Him (See Isaiah 61:7-8).

At three o'clock one morning I suddenly awoke and heard what sounded to me like an audible voice that said, "If God is real, then God is just." It was as if God wanted to remind me in a very strong way that I could always count on enjoying His justice in my life. This has been comforting to me. The Bible teaches us in Psalm 37 not to fret over evildoers, because they will be dealt with (See w. 1-2). Verse 8 says, "Cease from anger and forsake wrath; fret not yourself—it tends only to **evildoing**."

If someone has mistreated us, and we remain angry, we are just as guilty as the one who abused us. God has instructed that individual not to mistreat people, but He has also instructed us not to stay angry. When we stay angry, God will not work in our behalf. God begins where we finish. We are commanded several times in God's Word to forgive those who abuse us or mistreat us, to pray for them and love them, and to wait for God's justice:

Never return evil for evil or insult for insult (scolding, tongue-lashing, berating), but on the contrary blessing [praying for their welfare, happiness and protection, and truly pitying and loving them];

For know that to this you have been called, that you may yourselves inherit a blessing [from God—that you may obtain a blessing as heirs, bringing welfare and happiness and protection]. (1 Peter 3:9).

But I say to you who are listening now to Me: [in order to heed, make it a practice to] love your enemies, treat well (do good to, act nobly toward) those who detest you and pursue you with hatred,

Invoke blessings upon and pray for the happiness of those who curse you, implore God's blessing (favor) upon those who abuse you [who revile, reproach, disparage, and high-handedly misuse you]. (Luke 6:27-28)

These instructions are not easy to follow. Obviously it is impossible to do so unless we choose to press past our feelings. Yes, we must *press*. We must make an effort to forgive and to let go of anger. It almost seems unfair of God even to ask us to do such a thing. If you want to know the truth, I actually feel this is one of the most difficult things God asks of us. It is hard, but not impossible. The Lord never requires us to do anything without giving us the ability ' to do it. We may not want to forgive, but we are able to do so with God's help.

ARE YOU REALLY BEING MISTREATED?

Insecure people often perceive they are being mistreated when in actuality that is not the case at all. I can remember feeling mistreated and angry when Dave did not agree with me about minor issues. His opinion, which he certainly was entitled to have, was merely different than mine but I was so insecure I felt rejected. As they say, "I made mountains out of molehills." I would turn a minor incident into a tragedy because I was so touchy. When I did not get my way, I felt mistreated and became angry. When I was corrected in even a minor way, I responded with anger and felt I was being treated unfairly.

My point is this: it is possible to believe you are being treated unfairly when that is not the case at all. The way I processed people's reactions to me was totally out of balance because of my past abuse. I could not correctly discern when I was genuinely being mistreated compared to when people were simply being honest with me about their own feelings.

The truth is I was very angry because I was very insecure.

SEEKING COMPENSATION

People who have been hurt not only get angry, but often they also seek compensation for injustices done. There is a feeling that some payment is due them for their hurt. God clearly states that vengeance is *His*. He says He will repay our enemies and will compensate us; He actually promises a double blessing for our former **trouble** (See Romans 12:17-19 and Isaiah 61:7). I finally learned **that** if someone was truly mistreating me, I did not need to exact compensation. I could trust God to bring whatever justice was necessary, if any was necessary at all.

My father hurt me, and I was so angry that I spent years trying to collect what I thought was due me from people who had nothing to do with my hurt. For instance, God caused me to realize I was trying to collect a debt from my husband, Dave, that he did not owe. My father hurt me, and I didn't trust Dave. My father did not discipline me properly, so I was afraid to let Dave discipline our children. My father misused his authority in my life, so I was rebellious toward Dave's authority.

I know it sounds foolish, but we all have a tendency to do the same thing. We want someone to pay for our pain, and since we frequently cannot collect from the

one who hurt us, we lash out at others. They are confused because they have no idea why we respond to them the way we do. God wants us to trust Him to pay us back. He has brought a wonderful reward into my life. He has given me favor and promoted me beyond anything I could ever have imagined, but first I had to "let go and let God be God."

Someone I'll call Janet had this problem. Janet's father did not show her love and affection. When she got married, she expected her husband, John, to pay her back. He, of course, was not required to pay her back for what she missed in her childhood. He did not understand her actions, but then neither did she. She was reacting out of old wounds that still needed to be healed.

Janet required an excessive amount of attention from John. She **pressured** him to be with her all the time. She was jealous of any friends he had. She never received approval from her father, so she became an approval addict. John had to try to make her feel good about herself at all times. If he failed to tell her she looked nice, or the dinner was great, she felt hurt and ignored and she lashed out in anger. John felt controlled and manipulated; although he loved Janet, he was beginning to feel overwhelmed and wondered if he had made a mistake in marrying her. He tried very hard to please her, but nothing ever seemed to be enough; therefore, he felt defeated most of the time.

John had been a happy, easygoing guy when he and Janet got married, but now he was feeling depressed, discouraged, and angry. He dreaded coming home from work at night and did not look forward to weekends. Janet and John needed help!

Sad to say, Janet refused to get help; she blamed everything on John, and ultimately they ended up divorced. This scenario is repeated frequently in our society these days. The divorce rate is higher than ever, and it is partly because people who have been hurt in their past try to make people in their present pay them back for something they had nothing to do with. Because of old wounds they perceive they are being treated wrong when in fact that is not the case at all. They have to learn, just as I had to learn, that if they "feel" hurt it does not necessarily mean someone is really hurting them.

If the people involved in cases of this type are Christians, and they let God do so, He will heal them and bring justice into their lives. If they are not Christians, or if they are Christians but refuse to be obedient to God's instructions, either they will completely ruin their relationship, or at best they will limp along in an unhappy state

while their situation gradually gets worse. They will probably begin to see the effects in their physical bodies, and a round of doctor visits will begin. They will end up taking medicine for headaches, body aches, depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, stomach problems, and a long list of other ailments. The medicine may give them some relief, but the root of their problem is stress— stress that has been created by trying to collect compensation for past hurts instead of realizing that their job is to forgive those who hurt them and trust God to pay them back.

Please understand, sometimes medicine is necessary, and I am not dismissing that. But although symptoms are real, they are often stress related. I am only speaking to the underlying causes that many fail to recognize and address spiritually.

STOP WEARING THINGS THAT DON'T FIT

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:12-13 NIV, emphasis mine).

We are created to receive and give love. If we do anything else, it is like wearing clothes that are too small for us. I absolutely hate to wear a skirt or a pair of pants that are too tight in the waist. All day long I am uncomfortable. Many people are uncomfortable all the time. They feel a burden in their spirit. They have no joy or peace. They may fight feelings of depression regularly. The sad thing is that it is possible to spend one's entire life feeling that way and never face the truth about the root cause.

Hating people is hard work, and it poisons our life. God tells us in His Word to "put on love" (See Colossians 3:14 Niv). We are to clothe ourselves as representatives of God, Who is love (See Colossians 3:12 and 1 John 4:4). We are instructed to put on behavior that is marked by mercy, tenderhearted pity, kind feelings, gentle ways and patience, which is tireless and long-suffering. We are challenged to be people who have the power to endure whatever comes, with good temper, to readily pardon each other; even as the Lord has freely forgiven us, so we are to forgive one another (See Colossians 3:12-13).

God tells us that when we refuse to forgive those who have hurt us, He cannot forgive us our trespasses either (See Matthew 6:15). A refusal to forgive our enemies drives a wedge between us and God. It adversely affects all of our

relationships. When we are angry it comes out of us no matter whom we are angry at. A refusal to forgive adversely affects our faith, weighs heavily on our conscience, and prevents true worship. The Bible actually says we cannot say we love God if we don't love our brother and sister in Christ:

If anyone says, I love God, and hates (detests, abominates) his brother [in Christ], he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom he has not seen.

And this command (charge, order, injunction) we have from Him; that he who loves God shall love his brother [believer] also. (1 John 4:20-21)

Love is much more than a good feeling about someone. Love is a decision. When we are instructed in God's Word to "put on love," it means that we are to choose to love people. It is something we do on purpose whether we feel like it or not. I don't think I have a choice about whether I will forgive someone who has hurt me or treated me unjustly. I gave up the right to run my own life long ago. I want God's will, so I must do things His way.

Recently there were some very unkind and unfair newspaper articles written about our ministry and family. We agreed to interviews and were told favorable articles would be written based on them. We allowed the photographer who worked for the newspaper to attend our conferences for the purpose of taking pictures. The man must have taken a thousand photographs. But one of the most prominent ones featured in the paper was a large picture of our ushers standing in the back of the room holding stacks of offering buckets. This of course left the impression that we were money-hungry, dishonest ministers who were taking advantage of people.

For four days the front pages of our city newspaper were filled with information about us that was taken out of context and presented in an unbalanced manner. It hurt me deeply. I love the people in my city, and I did not want them to feel they could not trust me. For a while I was embarrassed even to go outside because of what people might be thinking. I was tested on everything I had ever said or written about forgiving our enemies. My confidence level was tested. But I have learned by experience that I could survive even if everyone did not approve of me. God gave me grace to keep on keeping on, but it was hard emotionally.

I so desperately wanted to defend myself against my critics, but God kept telling us to forgive them, pray for them, refuse to talk badly about them, and watch Him work. People in the city who loved us began calling the newspaper and

defending us. Actually the articles caused quite a stir at the newspaper office. Many people canceled their subscriptions. One woman called our office and said, "I have never been a contributor to your ministry, but I am canceling my newspaper subscription and will be sending you the money I was paying for it every month from now on."

We waited to see how the articles would affect our ministry. Would people reduce their giving or withdraw it entirely? Would people still attend our conferences? What kind of comments would we get? The outcome was glorious. The ministry grew in every way. Our financial support increased, attendance at our conferences grew, and in general people encouraged us and defended us. We actually felt that the event catapulted us into a new level in our ministry.

It was vitally important for us to obey God during this time and not try to vindicate ourselves. Walking in love is not easy when people are not acting lovely. I really felt the newspaper was very unkind, mean-spirited, and in some cases downright untruthful, but God used the event to promote us. The Bible says in Romans 8:28 [NKJV](#) that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. We kept loving God and doing what we felt God had called us to do. Instead of reacting in anger, we trusted Him to take care of us, and He did.

I wanted to share this example with you because I can still remember the pain I felt when I read those articles. I had just returned from holding an out-of-town conference. I was very tired and not in the mood for a shock. As you read this book, you may be experiencing the pain of being judged and criticized, betrayed, rejected, or disapproved. If so, you may be trying to work through feelings of [offense](#), [unforgiveness](#), bitterness, resentment, and anger. I just want you to know I really do know how you feel, and I know it is not always easy to overcome those feelings.

I also know making the right choice is worth it in the end, so be encouraged by my testimony to press past anger and unforgiveness. I believe if you will do so, you will see God's justice manifested in your life. He will give you double blessings for your former trouble. He will deliver you and promote you, if you keep walking in love.

Do what you know is right, not what you feel like doing!

WHO IS YOUR REAL ENEMY?

Laying blame is a problem, but laying blame in the wrong place is even worse. The Bible says our warfare is with the devil, not with people (See [Ephesians 6:12](#)). We desire revenge when people hurt us, but if the devil is really the one behind all of our pain, how can we get him back?

The Bible says we overcome evil with good (See Romans 12:21). Satan is evil, and the way to get back at him is to aggressively be good to everyone we meet, including our enemies. It is not natural to pray for one's enemies or to bless them. If we are bitter, we play right into his hands. We open a door for him to walk through and allow him to gain access to many areas of our lives through an unforgiving attitude. Our joy is adversely affected, as is our health, our peace, our prayer life, our sleep habits, [et cetera](#). Unity and agreement produce power, so it stands to reason that disagreement and disunity produce [powerlessness](#).

KEEP THE STRIFE OUT

I believe strife is initiated by demonic spirits sent out by Satan. Their job is to prevent joy, peace, progress, and prosperity. They are sent to destroy businesses, churches, ministries, marriages, and all other such institutions and relationships.

We are instructed by God to keep strife out of our lives (See [Philippians 2:3 KJV](#)). That is impossible to do unless we are willing to forgive freely and frequently. The ability to forgive requires an attitude of humility. We must realize we also need forgiveness— from God and from others—on a regular basis.

Contention comes only by a [prideful](#) attitude. It cannot come any other way. Where there is bickering and arguing, there is a haughty spirit that views itself as better than others (See James 3:14-16). The Bible says in Romans 2:1 that we judge others for the same things we do. We make excuses for our wrong actions. We give ourselves mercy, but are not willing to do the same for others. God will hold us accountable for this type of attitude. He requires us to forgive and press past anger.

Paul told the church located at [Phillipi](#) that he would be made happy if they would live in harmony:

Fill up and complete my joy by living in harmony and being of the same mind and one in purpose, having the same love, being in full accord and of one harmonious mind and intention. (Philippians 2:2)

Paul was aware of God's wonderful plan for His children. He wanted everyone to receive the best God had for them, and he knew that would be impossible if they did not live in harmony. We are repeatedly taught in Scripture to live in peace. In the Bible, Jesus Himself is called the "Prince of Peace"(Isaiah 9:6).

God has clearly instructed Dave and me that we must keep strife out of our life and ministry if we want to be successful at what He has called us to do. In order to do so, we must be generous with forgiveness. We must refuse to let bitterness take root in our hearts (See Hebrews 12:15). We cannot allow ourselves to be offended or remain angry. This means we cannot follow our feelings; we must press past feelings and do what God asks us to do.

Sometimes God asks us to simply let something go and not even mention it; at other times He requires us to confront and communicate openly about situations. Communication often clears up confusion and brings balance to situations that cause conflict. When people don't like to confront it is usually because they don't want anyone to be displeased with them or think badly of them. If a person has an addiction to approval they normally will not confront issues head on. This lack of confrontation opens the door for greater misunderstanding and strife.

response the devil expects or hopes for. When we do become angry and

There are also times when we just need to be patient and pray about a situation. Discerning how to handle each situation is a real key. A Chinese proverb says, "If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow." The person who can anger you has power over you. Each time you allow yourself to remain angry, you poison your own system. The Bible dearly states that the anger of man does not promote the righteousness that God desires (See James 1:20).

Strive to stay out of strife. Make an effort to live in peace with everyone (See Romans 12:18). Resist the temptation to let anger take root in your heart. I have found the more quickly I forgive, the less likely I am to have a real problem. The Bible teaches us to resist the devil at his onset (See 1 Peter 5:8-9). Don't wait too long to do what you know God wants you to do. The longer you wait, the harder it will be to obey.

When young David looked at the giant, Goliath, he ran quickly toward the battle line (See 1 Samuel 17:48). I think David knew that if he thought about Goliath too long, he might run away. He took action to obey God right away, and we need to always do the same. When God prompts us to take some action. His grace is

present to enable us. When we do things in our own timing, we often have to do them in our own strength.

FOUR STEPS TO VICTORY

You may choose to forgive and yet find your feelings toward the person who hurt you are still quite unforgiving. Forgiveness is a choice you make and you must earnestly work toward that goal. But understand it may take time. And that is okay. If we do what we can do. God will do what we cannot do. We cannot make wrong feelings go away any more than we can make right ones come, but God can and will. If we will simply do what Scripture instructs us to do, we will be able to work through the process of forgiveness. The first thing we must do is to forgive those who have hurt us. The second thing is to pray for them as God has told us to do. Another thing God tells us to do is to bless our enemies, so that is the third thing. To bless someone means to speak well of them and want good things for them. Refuse to talk unkindly about those who hurt you. Don't keep talking about what your enemies did that hurt you. It only keeps the pain stirred up in you.

I also believe we can and should bless our enemies in practical ways when it is appropriate. Once God led me to send gift certificates to someone who had been talking unkindly about me. The moment I did, I felt a release from the wound, and joy filled my soul. I did not send that person a gift because I thought that individual deserved one. I did it because God blesses those who do not deserve it, and I wanted to be like Him.

The fourth thing we must do is wait: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" ([Galatians 6:9 KJV](#)). Don't give up. Keep doing what is right, and wait on God to change your feelings.

I have applied these four principles in my life and have seen victory over adverse feelings every time.

LEARNING A NEW RESPONSE

Our problems are not really what defeat us; it is our angry and vengeful response to them. Responding to [offense](#) with forgiveness is a new way. Like most new things, it does not feel comfortable or right at first. That is why we must choose to press past the pain of anger. Learning to act on God's Word rather than reacting to old feelings is a new way.

Christianity was once called "the Way" (See Acts 9:2). It is a new way of living that includes a new response to the same old problems we have dealt with before. New ways, like some new shoes, are not comfortable at first, but that does not mean they are not good or effective. The old way of responding to **offense** with anger and **unforgiveness** has not produced good fruit in your life, so try a new way. Don't spend your life doing something that does not work out for your good.

Now I want us to take a look at one of the main characteristics of approval addiction we need to overcome: the **"people-pleaser"** attitude.