



Discovering Buried Treasure in Anger

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Anger has gotten a bad rap. The minute we hear the word we almost automatically put it under the heading of “negative,” “bad,” or “unacceptable.” Right?

At the mere mention of the word, I immediately recall childhood lectures from my parents, elementary teachers, and Sunday school leaders about making sure I had this terrible thing called “anger” under wraps. After all, the Bible says: **“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil” (Ps. 37:8).**

In my early 30’s I was shocked to discover another side of anger when I read this verse:

“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” (Eph. 4:26-27)

Suddenly, it dawned on me that God knows we will have anger and even allows us to have it; however, he wants us to manage it in a way that doesn’t produce sin. In recent years, I have learned that there is even “buried treasure” to be found in anger if we can learn to deal with it correctly. If we are to deal with anger before the sun goes down, God must be in favor of dealing with it very openly and directly.

Many of us form our understanding of anger by what was modeled in our home of origin. For example, my father was an exceptionally “controlled” man, almost always appearing in complete control of his emotions. I heard profanity from his lips only once in my growing up years, and I never saw him squeal car tires, slam doors, or yell at my mother. Undoubtedly, Dad experienced anger on a daily basis, but since he never let me see it, I grew up thinking it was never acceptable to let it show in the traditional way. On the other hand, I remember a regular “roasting session” at the family dinner table of various people who had angered my parents or 6 siblings along the road of life.

From this family background, I moved into adulthood, and thus the early years of marriage, with this unhealthy code for handling anger:

“It is not a good thing to have, but if you do become justifiably angry with someone, never express it openly or honestly to them; instead, bring it home to the dinner table and ‘serve it’ to the rest of your family. Before you tell us about it, be sure to rehearse it carefully in your mind so that you will be ready to deftly describe how lowly you perceive this person to be. It will make you feel better, and we will all join you in thinking less of the person you have described. If you are angry with someone in your own family, just stuff it and move on.”

If your code of conduct regarding anger is something similar to this, I would like to offer a few thoughts on a much healthier approach. Hopefully, these will strengthen, rather than destroy, relation-

ships in your home. It comes from over 45 years of marriage and almost 50 years of working in the marketplace, in churches, and in the military.

The Bible exhorts us to speak the truth in love, suggesting that we bring the truth (including our anger) out into the open in a loving manner. The "loving manner" part is the real challenge, right?

Although space does not allow Scriptural support for all of these suggestions, here are some ideas for discovering "buried treasure" in inter-family anger management (not necessarily for the office where you work):

1. With due regard for the venue and for the need to be respectful toward others, I recommend letting it out and then fixing the perceived damage later. Stuffing anger is more harmful than controlled venting. The ultimate goal is to get to the root cause of the anger—preferably with the person who is the object of your anger.
2. When your child or spouse appear to be very angry and, perhaps, out of control, remember that the outer packaging may be very deceiving. Deep hurt often looks very much like open rebellion. If the anger never gets vented, you may miss the hurt altogether. Helping another person get past their hurt is a buried treasure.
3. To be "mature" is to be redemptive in every situation. When someone in your family appears to be venting anger, put into practice Prov. 15:1: "A gentle answer turns away wrath." When another person vents anger to you, and then you respond with a gentle answer, they get a little taste of how God dispenses mercy and grace—when we don't even come close to deserving it.
4. Heat is a purifier of relationships. When anger makes us "hot," the dross (gunk) in our life is able to rise to the top so that it can be skimmed away by the loving hand of God. If you react to an angry family member in the right way, you can become that "skimmer" of the dross.
5. "Speaking the truth in love" is the bridge that takes us from infancy to maturity (Eph. 4:14-16). Even when packaged in anger, if buried or subdued truth can be spoken clearly and received lovingly, the relationship of the two people can mature dramatically in only one "truth session."
6. Continually refusing to acknowledge that we all have anger can lead to serious health problems. Speaking truth about the reality and source of your anger is like spitting out a mouthful of deadly poison—if you do it lovingly and respectfully.