

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-30 Christian Life: Overcoming Anger

Each person who serves as a counselor, minister, or adviser is human. Every human has imperfections. It is we ‘humans’ that God loved so desperately that he “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). He can understand our weaknesses. He was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us ... receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb 4:14-16).

Hurt, anger, and resentment are enemies of love, peace, and contentment. The first three can cause and worsen pain; the last three can breathe life into us and others. Yet at times there are voices that promote being angry and want to harm those they disagree with.

One of the deacons in the Early Church performed great wonders and signs among the people. His name was Stephen. Some other Jews opposed him, seized him, and falsely accused him in front of the high court. When they heard him speak, “they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.” They covered their ears and began yelling at the top of their voices. They “dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.” As Stephen was dying, he did not respond with anger. Instead, he cried, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:54-60).

As a counselor, you will meet many wounded and angry people. They may have accepted Christ and testified about him but are not well received by others. They are not actually being stoned, but hurtful remarks are thrown at them. Family and friends begin to either persecute them or to ignore them. It is hard not to be hurt and angry. The person is not dying physically but may feel like they are dying inside.

Imagine that a woman has come to you, who has been tormented by the words and actions of a family member. Here is an example of how a counseling session might go:

She says, “My sister-in-law claims she is a Christian, yet she makes me look foolish in the eyes of other family members because of my faith.”

Counselor: “How do you respond to her remarks?”

“I feel small and weak. I become angry with myself and her.”

Counselor: “Do you feel you are alone in dealing with her?”

“I do feel alone, every time I get around her, my anger grows and grows.”

Counselor: “So she determines whether you are happy and peaceful or miserable?”

“I try to think how I can get back at her and protect myself. I pray but seem to get nowhere with my prayers.”

Counselor: “Let’s clarify what you really want so you can pray with that in mind.”

“I would like to escape from the feelings I have about her.”

Counselor: “**That’s a good start. These scriptures can give you additional guidance:**”

- *Entrust your angry feelings to God.* “Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me” (Ps 54:4).
- *When you feel angry, do not act on it.* “Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools” (Ecc 7:9). “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).
- *Think and pray before you respond.* “Rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice ... You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self” (Col 3:8-10). “Be slow to anger, abounding in love” (Ex 34:6). “A gentle answer turns away wrath” (Prov 15:1).
- *Try to forgive—with God’s help—the one who caused you to be angry.* “Bear with each other and forgive one another ... as the Lord forgave you” (Col 3:13).

These scriptures teach us that anger can be controlled. Stopping a person from speaking is only controlling what is being said, not the anger they feel. Scriptures indicate as we control our response to a negative action from someone, we can have more control over our anger. Even when the anger is very justified, we can still say, “Jesus, I am so angry with that person. I need to be free of its hold on me.”

Literally, from the Cross, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). It seems that those who took part in trying, sentencing, and crucifying Jesus knew exactly what they were doing. But Jesus indicated that they did not understand the depth of their wrong and asked his Father to forgive them. Praying for God to forgive someone who hurts us is not putting them between us and God; it is placing us closer to God.

“Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD” (Ps 27:14). It is difficult to wait and to be still. But it is what the Bible tells us to do, and it gives God a chance to work on our behalf. If you think that this method of turning your back on anger is a sign of weakness, then consider how much strength of heart and character it requires. The benefit is that freedom from anger allows a person’s strength and focus to be on God.

The person in this discussion had a lot more to say about the person causing her the distress. This family member tormented her for years. The wise counselor will do as this example showed. Focus on the person who has come to you; they have asked for your support. The pain the person is enduring is the most important thing. The exact facts and what was said are not important. Help them to accept their value as a person and set boundaries.

As a counselor, you want to lead the person to forgiveness, not anger. Anger can lead to depression, even self-condemnation. How they face this opposition may determine their future ability to stand as a believer. God will help them deal with their anger as they turn to him.

This lesson is **important** because it explains how a caring counselor can help a person who is being ridiculed. They feel hurt and angry. You can point the person to what God’s Word says about their feelings.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that opposition comes to believers, who then react with human emotions. Christ understands our anger and pain. He will help the person who honestly turns to him.

Let's **review** by answering the following questions:

1. Who controls your anger? [Pause]
A. If you answered that it is up to you to control your own anger, you answered correctly.
2. Is refusing to be consumed with anger when someone wrongs you, a sign of weakness? [Pause]
A. If you said, "No, it takes great strength to ask God to forgive the sins of others against you," you are right.
3. When counseling, where should your focus be? [Pause]
A. If you said that a counselor's focus should be on the needs of the person seeking their help, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it several times. Learn the Bible passages that instruct a person how to cope with the anger they feel. Ask God to show you someone who needs counsel because of anger.