

KEEPING YOUR COOL



A TEEN'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

LOU PRIOLO

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For clarity, some of the citations from Puritan authors contained in this volume have been modified slightly (rephrased into modern English).

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I DON'T REMEMBER their names. I was seated at a book table at a home educators' conference somewhere in Utah (or maybe it was Arizona) as two teenage sisters introduced themselves to me. They mentioned that they had read *The Heart of Anger* and enjoyed it.

"Enjoyed it?" I said. "Most people don't use the word *enjoy* when they describe how that book impacted them."

"Well, we did," they continued. "And we were wondering if you ever thought about writing a *Heart of Anger* for teens."

Their words struck me like lightning out of the blue. "No, I haven't. But that is a wonderful idea. I will seriously think and pray about doing that." It didn't take much of either for me to realize that such a book was needed.

I am very grateful to my two "little sisters" out there somewhere in "mountain-standard-time-zone land," who inspired me to do this project.

I would also like to acknowledge several others whose contributions have been invaluable:

The youth of Eastwood Presbyterian Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and their parents, who patiently sat through my "Getting to the Heart of Anger" Sunday school class (and asked lots of helpful "fine-tuning" questions about the material).

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Thanks to everyone!



I'M NOT ANGRY!

“I CAN’T BELIEVE THIS! I’m sitting here reading a book that’s over two hundred and fifty pages long about how to deal with my ‘anger problem.’ I didn’t ask for this. Besides, I don’t think I’m *that* angry. But I was given your book and told I had to read it. Thanks a lot, Lou Priolo! Who are you, anyway, and what gives you the right to tell me how to solve my so-called ‘problem with anger’?”

I’m a counselor—a *biblical* counselor. This means that I depend not on psychology to help those who I counsel, but on God’s Word. No, I really *don’t* have any right to tell you how to solve your problems. It would be arrogant of me, a fellow sinner, to think that I did. Only God has the right to tell someone how to live his or her life. He does so in the Bible. One of the reasons the Bible was written is to show us how God wants us to behave (to think, to speak, and to act). It explains what kinds of attitudes and motives please Him and how, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, we can correct the things in our lives that displease Him. So this book is about not so much what *I* think you ought to do to change, but what *the Bible* says about the things you can do to identify and correct sinful anger in your life.

“But I told you, I don’t think I have that big a problem with anger.”

Okay, that’s fair. However, please give me a chance to show you how to deal with your anger issues even if they are relatively small. Sinful anger, in any form, can mess up our relationships. So what you learn as a result of reading this book will help you to improve your relationship

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not only with your parents and siblings, but also with your friends and, someday, with your spouse.

Besides, anger is something we all have to deal with each day of our lives; you are not alone in your struggle. You can find the word *anger* mentioned over *five hundred times* in the Bible (far more than the word *fear*, which appears over *three hundred times*). As a counselor, I have to help people deal with the sin of anger and its roots more than with any other sin. It's one of the most prevalent sins in all of life.

HOW DID I GET THIS WAY?

Unlike many psychological counseling theories that require years of analysis to determine exactly how each person got so messed up, the Bible teaches that we are all sinners. It tells us that we were born that way: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5 NIV; see also Eph. 2:3). Additionally, we can be influenced by others and can pick up (learn) other sinful habit patterns. “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’ ” (1 Cor. 15:33; see also 1 Cor. 5:6). Even our parents can influence us in wrong ways.

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that *you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers.* (1 Peter 1:17–18 NIV)

According to Scripture, when an individual continually gives himself over to a particular sin, he eventually becomes bound by that sin (see John 8:34; Rom. 6:16; 2 Peter 2:19). At some point in this process, the effect of his sin begins to bleed over into other areas of his life (school, work, family, church, and health, for example). As his life becomes increasingly dominated by the characteristics and consequences of his sin (Gal. 6:7–8; James 1:8), the problem may become so severe that God classifies that person by the name of the sin that has

mastered him.¹ One of the terms used to describe an individual who has given himself over to the sin of anger is “an angry man.”

The Bible specifically warns us not to hang around this kind of person.

Do not associate with a man given to anger;
Or go with a hot-tempered man,
Lest you learn his ways,
And find a snare for yourself. (Prov. 22:24–25)

Come with me for a moment into my counseling office.

Jim and Linda² sat across the desk from me with tears in their eyes. They were frustrated because their son was so difficult to manage. Linda began their story:

“We can’t control Joshua. He is determined to have his own way. We’re embarrassed by how he talks to us. His teacher says he disrupts the whole class. She has even suggested that he may need to be placed on medication to control his behavior. I feel guilty and ashamed because I have failed as a mother. We don’t know what to do, and I feel like there is no hope. We’re so afraid that if Joshua doesn’t get help now, he is going to be a first-class rebel in just a few years.”

As Jim and Linda proceeded with their story, they were still wondering why the counseling center at which I work had a rather unusual policy regarding the counseling of kids. As a rule, unless a crisis or an emergency exists, I will not see a young person without first having two or three sessions with his parents. As I explained to Jim and Linda, the reason for this policy is not to allow them to gossip about or slander their son to me, nor is it that I might build a case against him. Rather, the purpose of this policy is to identify how Jim and Linda might be sinning

1. A person who continually gives himself over to the sin of drunkenness is classified by God as a *drunkard* (1 Cor. 6:10). One who continually gives himself over to folly is identified in Scripture as a *fool* (Prov. 26:11). So it goes for those who continually lie, steal, and fornicate. They shall be called *liars*, *thieves*, and *fornicators*. The complete list of characterological sins is too lengthy to cite here. Suffice it to say that “the evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast” (Prov. 5:22 NIV).

2. Jim and Linda are pseudonyms for a composite couple taken from actual counseling cases.

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against Joshua so that I may help them to remove the beams from their own eyes before they attempt to remove the splinter from Joshua's.³

Jim and Linda continued providing me with information in answer to specific questions that I was asking to help me formulate a tentative diagnosis of the existing problems within their family. While this question and answer process continued, I listened for *patterns of behavior* that could be identified as “pathological” from a biblical point of view, “not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Cor. 2:13 NIV).

After some time, I walked over to the white board in my office. I then began listing the patterns of behavior that they had described in Joshua. Based on his parents' observations, I identified eleven undesirable behavior patterns:

1. Outbursts of anger (temper tantrums)
2. Argumentation (quarrelsome debates)
3. Disrespect
4. Fighting (violence)
5. Animosity
6. Cruelty
7. Strife (antagonism)
8. Acts of vengeance
9. Malice
10. Bitterness
11. Discouragement (apathy and indifference)

“Can you see a common denominator in all these behaviors?” I asked.

“Yes! I never thought of it like that before,” Linda said. “It's anger! Joshua has an anger problem.”

3. There are 168 hours in every week. If I see Josh for one hour each week, only to send him back into an environment that is making it easier for him to sin and more difficult for him to overcome his sinful habits (rather than making it more difficult for him to sin and easier for him to overcome his sinful habits), my one hour of *good influence* may be neutralized by the many hours of *bad influence* to which he is being exposed in his own home.

Writing “anger” next to the list I had written, I explained, “It looks as though Joshua may have developed some of the characteristics of *the angry man* described in the book of Proverbs.”

An angry man stirs up strife,
And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression. (Prov. 29:22)

Do not associate with a man given to anger;
Or go with a hot-tempered man,
Lest you learn his ways,
And find a snare for yourself. (Prov. 22:24–25)

The question I would like you to be thinking about as you continue with this chapter is, Do I qualify as an angry person? That is, has anger so dominated my life that I could rightly be considered an honorary member of God’s “angry person” club? Perhaps your anger issues are not yet as severe as Joshua’s, but any sin, if left unchecked, can and usually will lead to greater problems and consequences.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF REBELLION

Did you know that there is a connection between anger and rebellion? Anger often leads to rebellion against authority. This process develops not just in young people, but also in wives who rebel against their husbands, in employees who rebel against their employers, in church members who rebel against the authority of the church—and in anyone who sinfully rebels against a divinely appointed authority.

This anger-to-rebellion process often can be traced through five distinct steps. These five steps on the stairway to destruction are hurt, bitterness, anger, stubbornness, and finally rebellion.

Hurt (Wounded Spirit)

Proverbs 18:14 asks, “A wounded spirit who can bear?” (KJV). The first step in the process is a hurt that is spawned by an offense (real or

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perceived).⁴ This hurt is the seed that often germinates and grows into a root of bitterness (Heb. 12:15). When someone does something to offend us, it's our mental and emotional response to the offense that produces the "hurt." Think about the last time someone hurt you. How did you respond? It's our sinful bent to defend (or protect) ourselves by reacting outwardly or inwardly with some form of anger.

Bitterness

Bitterness is the second step on the stairway. If you do not respond biblically to the hurt (this involves forgiving the sin, overlooking the sin, or realizing that the "offense" was not wrong in God's eyes), you may begin to rehearse the offense in your mind—reviewing it over and over again. The practice of continually reviewing and imputing (charging your offender with the fault or responsibility for) the offense violates 1 Corinthians 13:5 ("love doesn't keep records of wrongs" CCNT). It also cultivates the seed of hurt that matures into a "root of bitterness." And your "root of bitterness" may defile others in your life.⁵ "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled" (Heb. 12:15).

Anger

Anger is the third step on the stairway. This is the kind of anger to which the Bible warns fathers not to provoke their children (see Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). This sort of anger is not simply the momentary explosive type of fury that quickly dies down (the kind that typically follows *hurt* and precedes *bitterness*). Rather, it's the characterological (life-dominating) sort of anger of which I spoke earlier. It's the kind of anger that has

4. What your parents do to you may or may not be a sin. But, if they have not sinned against you, you ought not to be "offended." It's one thing to be disappointed when your parents do something that bugs you or disappoints you. But unless they sin in the process, technically they have committed no offense against you. If they have sinned, they are in need of repentance. If you are offended by something your folks do that is not a sin, *you* are in need of repentance. (You need to change your mind about being so "stressed" over something your parents did that doesn't offend God.)

5. Please notice that I said, "*may* defile," not "*will* defile." Christians may not knowingly allow themselves to be the "victims" of other men's sin.

become so habitual that it is now characteristic of one's personality. It's this "life-dominating anger" that the contents of this book have been especially designed to address.

Stubbornness (Insubordination)

This step immediately precedes full-blown rebellion. "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. 15:23 NKJV). The self-sufficient rebel in the making is guilty of idolatry because he believes that he has become the ruler of his own destiny. The picture of stubbornness here is that of a backsliding heifer *pushing* her front hooves into the ground to counteract her master who is trying to pull (or push) her forward. Look at it from your parents' perspective. Do you think they can relate to this picture?

Rebellion

A rebel is someone whose characteristics have gone beyond that of an *angry man* and have taken on the characteristics of the proverbial *fool*. There is no better and more comprehensive description in the Bible of a rebel than the same description given of the fool. In case you are wondering whether you have gone beyond the scope of an *angry man* to that of a *rebel*, I have a little test you can take. Read through the following list of characteristics of a fool and put a check next to the ones that describe you. Perhaps you can also find someone other than yourself (a parent, teacher, friend, or church leader) to evaluate you from another perspective.

25 CHARACTERISTICS OF A FOOL

Characteristics	Proverbs
<input type="checkbox"/> He despises wisdom and instruction	1:7
<input type="checkbox"/> He hates knowledge	1:22
<input type="checkbox"/> He hurts his mother	7:25
<input type="checkbox"/> He grieves his mother	10:1
<input type="checkbox"/> He enjoys devising mischief	10:23

I'M NOT ANGRY!

- | | |
|---|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> He is right in his own eyes | 12:15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He is quick to anger | 12:16 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He hates to depart from evil | 13:19 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He is deceitful | 14:8 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He is arrogant and careless | 14:16 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He rejects his father's instruction | 15:5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He despises his mother | 15:20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He does not respond well to discipline | 17:10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He does not understand wisdom | 17:16 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He has a worldly focus (carnal value system) | 17:24 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He grieves his father | 17:25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He does not consider discussing any viewpoint but his own | 18:2 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He provokes others to strife and anger by the things he says | 18:6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He has a smart mouth that usually gets him into trouble | 18:7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He is quarrelsome (contentious) | 20:3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He is a spendthrift | 21:20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He repeats his folly (foolishness) | 26:11 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He trusts in his own heart | 28:26 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He cannot resolve conflicts | 29:9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> He gives full vent to his anger | 29:11 |

_____ Total Score (number of checked boxes)

How many of these characteristics are true of you? The higher your score, the more you will gain from reading this book. But even if you recognized only one or two "foolish characteristics" in your life, there is still much from which you can benefit in the pages ahead. Remember, the best insurance against the development of characterological rebellion is to prevent characterological anger: "Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools" (Eccl. 7:9).

ANGER IN MY HEART

My first book, *The Heart of Anger*, was written to help parents of characterologically angry children to train them to deal with anger biblically. It teaches parents to help their children identify and correct both *external* and *internal* manifestations of sinful anger. This book will do the same for you. We will look first at learning how, by God's grace, you can control sinful, *external* manifestations of anger. Then (and more importantly), you will learn how to identify and correct the wrong kind of *internal* anger that resides in your heart.

However, if you do not have Christ in your heart (see Eph. 3:17), you will *not* be able to make those changes—at least not in a way that will please God. No one can make such changes apart from the Holy Spirit's enabling power. If you have any doubt that you are a true Christian, whose sins have been forever forgiven because of Christ's death on your behalf, and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, let me urge you to not go on to chapter 2 until you have read appendix A, "How to Become a Christian."

IF

you are a teenager, you probably know plenty about issues like arguing with your parents, rebelling against authority, and attitude problems—either firsthand or because it seems everyone expects you to be like that!

But what if you knew that these things usually spring from a problem with *anger*; that they're the result of being a sinner, not a teenager; and that you can have more control over them than people think you can?

Biblical counselor Lou Priolo provides a practical, understandable, and biblical approach to mastering sinful anger and its causes and effects. He helps you to assess your level of anger and what form it takes, to identify some of the heart issues that lead to anger (and how to replace them with biblical attitudes), and to have open communication with your parents without the distractions that cause arguments.

PRACTICAL TOOLS SUCH AS JOURNALING EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TALK OVER WITH YOUR PARENTS HELP YOU TO TAKE MEASURABLE STEPS TOWARD KEEPING YOUR COOL

“Refreshingly and doggedly biblical. With a thoroughly gospel-centered approach, [Lou] helps young people to confront sin head on and move toward finding both grace and change by the power of God’s Word and Spirit, while remaining intensely practical and concrete.”

JON NIELSON, COLLEGE PASTOR, COLLEGE CHURCH, WHEATON, ILLINOIS

“Being a teenager is hard. Finally help is available! Lou Priolo shows what teenage anger is and where it comes from. Open these pages and you will find hope, encouragement, and the Savior.”

RICK HOLLAND, COFOUNDER OF THE RESOLVED AND ANCHORED YOUTH CONFERENCES

LOU PRIOLO is a Fellow of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors and an instructor with Birmingham Theological Seminary. He has been the Director of Biblical Counseling at Eastwood Presbyterian Church since 1998.

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