

Reframing Emotions

Reframing Anger: A Guide for Going Deeper

Note for Users:

Reframing Anger: A Guide for Going Deeper is the fifth week in an 11-week guide that accompanies the podcast *More to It: Reframing Emotions*.¹ Each session is designed to help you and your community know, love, and praise God for His wonderful design for our emotions, even the ones we view as “negative.” The guide features an episode summary, definitions of relevant terms, Scripture reading, discussion questions, activities, prayers, and reflection prompts.

Each section in a session (for example, prayer and discussion) features a timestamp, but the timestamp is simply a suggestion for the amount of time to spend. At times, you and your community may want to linger with the discussion questions. Or maybe you need to spend more time engaging with a concept through a small group activity. You should prioritize what produces the most flourishing in your community, even if it means bending or breaking the time “rules.”

In the podcast, one of our counselors suggests emotions—even the negative ones—are echoes of Eden. If we listen to those echoes and follow them to their source, we might just end up back in the garden, not hiding from God, but experiencing the forevermore joy found in His presence. As you use this guide with your community, we pray that a spirit of unity, curiosity, and humility will be present, creating a space in which you can be vulnerable, drawing near to God and one another.

The Austin Stone Institute, The Austin Stone Counseling Center

¹ Subscribe to the podcast here: <https://pod.link/1626545281>.

Session 5: Anger

Episode Main Point

God has given us anger to help us decipher what's going on in our hearts, to assess what our hearts love, and to repent of any anger that serves ourselves and our glory rather than God's glory and people's flourishing.

Episode Summary

Anger seems constant. Someone cuts us off in traffic, and, at the least, our bodies go rigid. Maybe we mutter at the driver or, in the more extreme cases, shake our fist, honk the horn, et cetera. But what if an ambulance, alarms and lights blaring, cuts us off? We react differently. We assume, rightly or wrongly, that the ambulance deserves the right of way. It seems just.

The counselors say anger is a response to a perceived injustice—like being cut off in traffic. Sometimes that injustice is objectively real. A person is being harmed or misrepresented, and something within us says, "That's not right. No one should be treated that way." Other times it's a matter of perception, of the narratives that have molded our brains. Anger has become a mode of self-protection in response to a threat.

We don't always know what our anger indicates in the moment. We need a community that will sit with us in our anger and invite us to consider what it's telling us. Why are—or aren't—we angry? What other emotions might our anger be muting? What lies beneath the anger? Discovering the emotions behind our anger is hard work, but it's essential to understanding ourselves and working toward a life in which anger does not overwhelm us.

It's also essential to begin changing not only how we think about anger but also how we act in response to it. Jesus was angry—and did not sin. How is that possible? The counselors suggest Jesus' anger never aimed at self-glory or self-preservation. Rather, it ignited in response to misrepresentations of God and His character, and mistreatment of God's image-bearers. Jesus' anger was deeply rooted in love, love for God and love for people.

Our anger is shouting at us. Maybe we should listen to it.

Definitions

- **Anger:** Anger is a response to a perceived injustice.

- **Justice:** Justice has several definitions, but helpful ones connect justice with the sense of what is proper or harmonious, reasonable, and righteous. Justice looks like “acting or being in conformity with what is morally upright or good” (Merriam-Webster).
- **Injustice:** If justice is doing the good, especially for the benefit of others, injustice is the opposite. Injustice harms people. It denies people universally agreed-upon rights, ignores human dignity, and ultimately dehumanizes people.
- **Vengeance:** Vengeance can be thought of as retribution or retaliation. It can *feel* like justice in the moment, but it more often than not continues a cycle of injustice and anger.
- **Sublimation:** Sublimation masks an unacceptable form of desire or impulse (e.g., anger) with one considered more socially or culturally acceptable.

Scripture

Genesis 4:1–16; 2 Corinthians 5:16–17; Jonah 4; Matthew 21:12–17; Galatians 5:13–15; Romans 12:9–21; James 1:19–27; Proverbs 18:17; 1 Corinthians 13:8–12

Pray (5 min)

Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.

Heavenly Father, what should we do with our anger? Help us to come to Your Word with curious minds and open hearts, ready to hear what You have to say. Lead us to recognize and confess any sin that results from anger. Teach us to be people who are quick to listen and slow to speak. Guard our minds, hearts, mouths, and hands from anger that harms instead of heals. We want to honor You, Father, in all we do and in all we feel. May even our anger draw us closer to You and Your people. Amen.

Read (5–10 min)

Either read the following Bible verses aloud or invite a volunteer to read.

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴ And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?”

⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” ⁹ But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰ And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” (Jonah 3:10–4:11)

Discuss (15–20 min)

Answer the following questions.

- Summarize the events depicted in Jonah 3:10–4:11. What stands out to you?
- Sublimation is masking one emotion with another. In what ways does Jonah sublimate his emotions? How does God challenge Jonah to be honest, with himself and with God?
- We don’t know what happened to Jonah after God speaks. But we can guess, and we can imagine. Jonah wrote of his experience, after all. What does that writing suggest to you about Jonah’s heart? What kind of person do you imagine Jonah became after God confronted him?
- Jonah needed someone—God in this case—to correct his misplaced anger and subsequent behavior. Why couldn’t Jonah change on his own? What does Jonah’s inability to move on from his anger suggest about *our* need for God’s transforming work, through His Spirit and our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Engage (10 min)

In smaller groups of 2 and 3, respond to the following questions.

- Read one of the accounts in which Jesus cleanses the temple (Matthew 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–18; Luke 19:45–47; John 2:14–16). How does Jesus’ anger differ from Jonah’s?
- Our anger can either produce destruction or restoration. Consider what usually happens when you feel angry. Confess any destructive habits—as specifically or as generally as you feel comfortable sharing—and ask the people in your group to help you repent, moving toward habits of love that result in repair and restoration.



Pray (5 min)

Either read the following liturgy, a worshipful prayer, aloud or invite a volunteer to read.

A Liturgy for Being Slow to Anger

God, You get angry.

Being angry doesn't break the bounds of Your desire for me,

but my faulty heart longs for retribution.

This hurt is a heavy burden,

and hostility feels stronger than vulnerability.

Father, when anger and adrenaline course through my veins

and harsh words beg to break out of my strained mouth,

use the hurt caused by others to remind me

how I wound You,

and how You forgive me every single time.

When I want to dwell on my frustration and angst,

or when a friend says something harsh—

make me slow to anger.

Give me a gracious heart.

Help me reconcile my pain without sin;

make me more like You.

Reflect

Complete the following reflection on your own.

Spend 15 minutes this week evaluating the narratives that influence how you think about anger. Maybe you grew up in a conservative household and learned that anger was to be suppressed.

Or maybe you pretend it doesn't exist because you regularly witnessed the devastation of volcanic anger. Then again, you may have become accustomed to anger. Our culture trains us to be quick to respond rather than quick to listen (James 1:19–27). It tells us the louder our anger, the stronger our presence and more certain our position. But are those the best narratives for our anger?

Spend 15–20 minutes looking up verses about God and anger. A good starting point can be Jonah or the Psalms. What does the Bible have to say about anger? Why does God get angry? What does He do in response? What does that tell you about the shape your anger should take? What might you need to confess to God and a close friend in response to what you have learned and discerned about yourself?

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