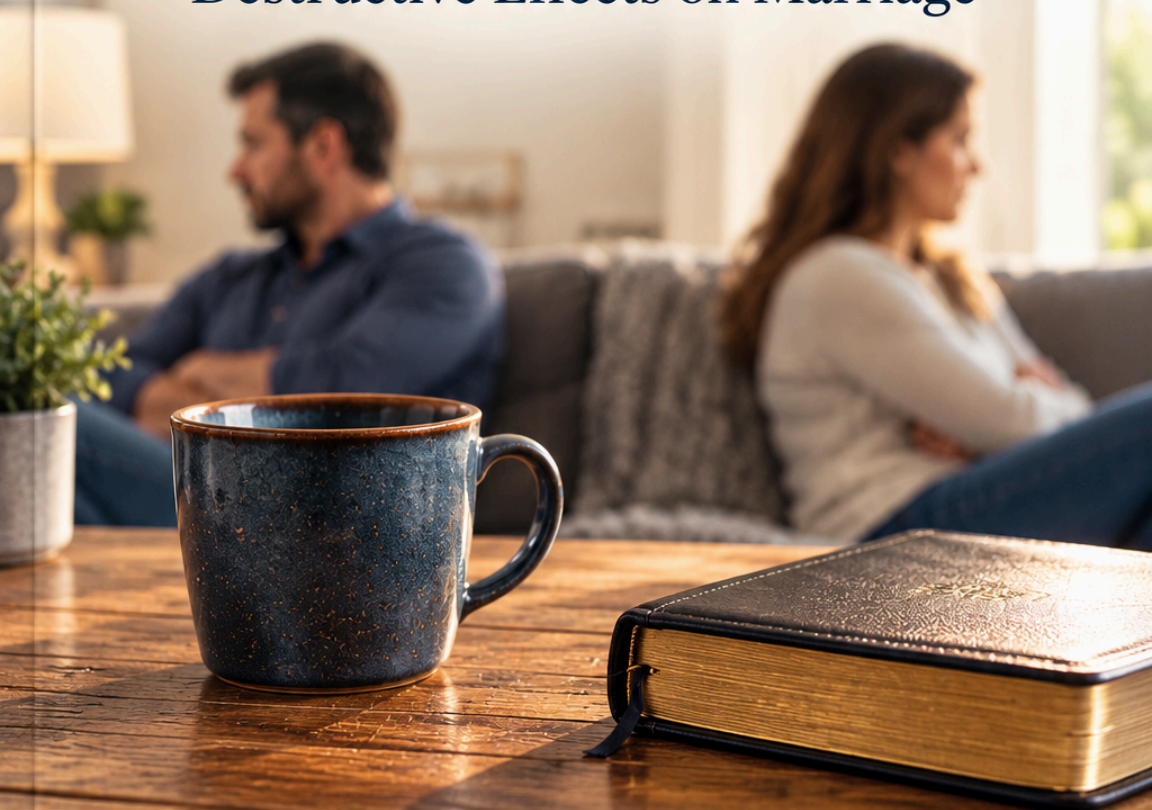


Why Do I Keep Getting Angry?

Understanding Anger and Its
Destructive Effects on Marriage



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Introduction: Why Does This Keep Happening?

A husband and wife have another argument. It may begin with something relatively insignificant. One spouse makes a comment the other does not appreciate. Someone responds defensively. Voices rise. Accusations follow. Before long, the couple is arguing about matters that have little to do with the original disagreement.

Eventually the argument ends. Perhaps one spouse walks away. Perhaps they stop speaking to each other. They may apologize later. But before long, the same thing happens again.

Why?

Many husbands and wives recognize that their anger is hurting their marriage. They know they should not speak harshly, make accusations, or treat one another with contempt. They may sincerely regret what they have said or done. Nevertheless, they continue responding in the same way.

Over several decades of biblical counseling, I have counseled more than 1,000 married couples. One problem I have encountered repeatedly is that husbands and wives often recognize their sinful behavior but do not understand why they keep repeating it.

They may blame circumstances, personalities, or their spouses. Sometimes they believe anger is simply an unavoidable emotional reaction. Scripture gives us a different understanding.

The Bible teaches that anger is not always sinful. It also teaches that sinful anger arises from the heart and can become a habitual response to life's circumstances. If we are going to understand why anger continues to cause problems in marriage, we must examine what God says about it.

This booklet is intended to help you do that.

1. Is Anger Always Sinful?

Some Christians believe that becoming angry is always wrong. Consequently, whenever they experience anger, they assume they have sinned. That is not what Scripture teaches.

In Ephesians 4:26, Paul instructs believers to be angry without sinning. It is possible to be angry without sinning.

Jesus Christ Himself demonstrated righteous anger. In Mark 3:1–6, He encountered religious leaders more concerned about their Sabbath objections than the suffering of a man with a withered hand. Mark 3:5 tells us that Jesus looked at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart. His anger was not sinful.

God is also described throughout Scripture as angry with wickedness. His anger is always righteous because His character is perfectly holy.

However, we must be careful. People frequently justify their anger by claiming they have a good reason to be angry. They believe that because someone treated them unfairly, their response must be righteous. That conclusion does not necessarily follow.

A husband may have a legitimate concern about something his wife has done. A wife may have a legitimate concern about her husband's behavior. But having a legitimate concern does not justify responding sinfully.

A person can be right about the problem and wrong in the way he responds to it.

The question is not simply, "Do I have a reason to be angry?" The more important question is, "Is my response consistent with the character and commands of Jesus Christ?"

2. When Anger Becomes Sinful

Anger becomes sinful when it violates God's commands and reflects attitudes or desires contrary to His Word. Sometimes sinful anger is obvious. A husband yells at his wife. A wife insults her husband. One spouse uses cruel language or deliberately says something intended to cause pain.

But sinful anger is not always loud. Some people express it through resentment, bitterness, or a deliberate refusal to communicate. They may punish a spouse by withholding ordinary kindness. A person does not have to raise his voice to sin in anger.

Ephesians 4:31 identifies bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice as conduct believers must put away. These sins can appear in different forms, but they all violate God's commands.

James 1:19–20 instructs believers to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. James then explains that human anger does not achieve the righteousness of God.

Think how often marital arguments involve the opposite behavior. Instead of listening carefully, spouses interrupt. Instead of speaking thoughtfully, they react immediately. Instead of exercising self-control, they allow anger to govern their words.

Some even believe their anger will force their spouse to change. But sinful anger cannot accomplish God's righteous purposes. A husband cannot produce genuine godliness in his wife through intimidation. A wife cannot produce godliness in her husband through contempt. Sinful methods do not become righteous because a person hopes to achieve a good result.

Threats, intimidation, physical violence, and coercive control are serious forms of mistreatment, not ordinary disagreements. A spouse who is being abused is not responsible for causing the offender's sin. Seeking protection and appropriate help is not a failure to practice biblical love.

3. Why Do I Keep Responding the Same Way?

One of the most important questions a husband or wife can ask is this: “If I know my anger is wrong, why do I keep responding this way?”

Many people assume that recognizing sinful behavior should automatically bring about change. But recognizing a problem and changing an established pattern of behavior are not the same thing.

Consider a person who has spent years responding to frustration with angry words. Something happens that he dislikes. He becomes irritated, speaks harshly, and blames someone else. The next time he encounters a similar situation, he responds in much the same way.

After years of repetition, that sinful response has become habitual. He may no longer give much conscious thought to what he is doing. His response seems immediate and natural. But the fact that behavior has become habitual does not make it involuntary or morally acceptable.

We understand habits in ordinary life. A person learns to play a musical instrument through repeated practice. A skilled musician eventually performs movements that once required careful attention. Unfortunately, sinful patterns can also become deeply established through repetition.

A husband who habitually responds to correction with defensiveness may do so whenever his wife raises a concern. A wife who habitually responds to disappointment with accusations may continue the same response whenever expectations are unmet.

These responses may feel natural because they have been practiced repeatedly. But they are not beyond biblical change. Scripture does not excuse sinful anger because a person has practiced it for many years. Neither does it teach that entrenched sinful habits must remain unchanged.

A person may genuinely dislike the consequences of his anger without being committed to changing the sinful behavior itself. He may want fewer arguments or a more peaceful home. Those desires are understandable. Genuine biblical change, however, requires accepting responsibility before God.

4. The Heart Behind Anger

Jesus teaches that our words and actions reveal what is taking place in the heart. In Luke 6:45, He explains that a person's speech proceeds from what fills the heart.

This means angry words do not originate merely in difficult circumstances. Circumstances may provide the occasion for a response, but they do not justify sinful conduct.

Consider a husband who comes home after a difficult day at work. He is tired and frustrated. His wife asks about something that needs to be done around the house. He responds harshly. Later he explains, "I was tired. I had a difficult day."

Those circumstances help us understand the occasion for his response. They do not justify his sinful words. Another husband might face similar circumstances and respond patiently. The circumstances alone do not explain the moral difference.

James 4:1–3 points to desires that contribute to quarrels and conflicts. In marriage, these may include desires for comfort, control, recognition, or having one's own way.

Wanting consideration, affection, or cooperation is not necessarily sinful. But even a legitimate desire can become an occasion for sinful anger when a person insists on obtaining it through sinful means.

If a husband believes his anger is caused entirely by his wife, he will focus on changing her. If a wife believes her anger is caused entirely by her husband, she will focus on changing him. Neither may carefully examine personal conduct.

The result is a marriage in which both spouses are waiting for the other to change. Scripture directs each person to examine his or her own heart before God.

5. How Anger Damages Marriage

Marriage brings two people together to share ordinary life: decisions, disappointments, financial pressures, parenting responsibilities, and unforeseen difficulties. Disagreements are inevitable. Destructive arguments are not.

When sinful anger becomes habitual, it damages marriage in several ways.

First, anger damages communication. A husband or wife may become reluctant to raise concerns because previous conversations have ended in arguments. Important matters remain unresolved.

Second, anger produces additional conflict. A disagreement that could have been discussed calmly becomes an exchange of accusations, insults, and old grievances. The couple is no longer addressing the original issue; each is defending himself or attacking the other.

Third, anger damages trust. When one spouse repeatedly responds with hostility, the other may become uncertain about how ordinary conversations will unfold. No husband or wife should have to live in fear of a spouse's temper.

Fourth, anger influences the household. Children observe how their parents respond to frustration. They hear the words used and see how one parent treats the other. Repeated sinful anger provides a harmful example, even when parents later tell their children that such behavior is wrong.

Finally, anger can weaken companionship. Couples may avoid each other. Conversations shrink to necessary matters. Ordinary kindness and affection may diminish.

Not every marriage experiencing anger will display all these problems. But repeated sinful anger can seriously damage a relationship. The answer is not to pretend disagreements do not exist. It is to address them in ways that honor Jesus Christ.

6. Why Blaming Your Spouse Does Not Solve the Problem

One of the most common obstacles to biblical change is blame.

A husband says, “I would not get angry if my wife would stop criticizing me.” A wife says, “I would not respond that way if my husband would listen to me.” Both statements place responsibility for personal conduct on someone else.

If my sinful behavior is caused by another person’s actions, then I cannot change until that person changes. My obedience becomes dependent on someone else’s behavior. But Scripture never makes obedience to God dependent on another person’s willingness to obey Him.

In Matthew 7:3–5, Jesus warns against concentrating on the speck in another person’s eye while failing to recognize the log in our own. His instruction does not mean that another person’s wrongdoing should always be ignored. It means that we must deal honestly with our own sin.

A husband may have a legitimate complaint against his wife. A wife may have a legitimate complaint against her husband. Neither is justified in responding sinfully.

Each spouse must answer to God for personal conduct. This does not mean that both spouses are equally responsible for every conflict. Sometimes one spouse is clearly the offender and the other has been wronged. A victim of abuse must not be pressured to accept blame for the offender’s conduct.

Personal responsibility means acknowledging what we ourselves have done, not accepting responsibility for another person’s sin.

As long as a husband or wife continues saying, “I would not act this way if my spouse would change,” the focus remains on someone else. Biblical change begins with taking responsibility for our own response.

7. Is Genuine Change Possible?

Some husbands and wives become discouraged because they have struggled with anger for many years. They may conclude, “This is just the way I am.” Others believe their temperament makes angry responses unavoidable.

But Scripture does not teach that Christians must remain enslaved to established sinful habits.

Ephesians 4:22–24 describes putting off the old self, being renewed in the spirit of the mind, and putting on the new self. Paul is describing a fundamental change in the believer’s manner of life. God does not merely tell Christians to recognize sinful behavior. He calls them to live differently.

In Ephesians 4:31–32, Paul applies this instruction to anger and the treatment of others. He identifies bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice as conduct to be put away. He then directs believers toward kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness.

Scripture does not present biblical change as merely suppressing unpleasant feelings. God calls for a different pattern of conduct.

This is encouraging. A person who has practiced sinful anger for many years is not required to remain that way. The fact that a habit is deeply established does not place it beyond the transforming power of God’s Word.

However, we must distinguish between understanding biblical truth and faithfully applying it. A person may know what Scripture teaches about anger and still continue practicing sinful responses. Knowledge alone is not obedience.

James 1:22 warns believers against being hearers of the Word who fail to become doers. Genuine change involves taking God’s commands seriously and responding to them in faith.

Christians should approach the problem of anger with humility, because we must acknowledge our sin, and with hope, because God has not left His people without instruction.

8. Understanding the Problem Is Only the Beginning

Perhaps you have recognized familiar patterns in your own marriage. You may see that your anger is not simply the result of difficult circumstances. You may recognize habitual ways of responding to frustration, disagreement, or disappointment.

Perhaps you have repeatedly promised yourself that you would not respond angrily again, only to discover that the same behavior continues.

Recognizing these things is important. But recognizing a problem is not the same as correcting it. A person can understand why his behavior is sinful and still continue practicing it.

This is one reason biblical counseling must involve more than discussing problems. The goal is not simply to help people feel better about their circumstances or gain insight into behavior. The goal is to help them understand and obey the Word of God.

Colossians 1:28–29 describes proclaiming Christ, admonishing and teaching people with the goal of presenting them mature in Christ. Paul also acknowledges that his labor depends upon God's power working within him.

Biblical change involves human responsibility and dependence upon God. Christians are called to obey, and they must rely upon the Lord as they do so.

If sinful anger has become a habitual response in your marriage, do not conclude that your situation is hopeless. Neither should you assume that merely understanding the problem will automatically resolve it.

God's Word provides instruction for recognizing sinful conduct and developing a different manner of life. The question is whether we are willing to take that instruction seriously.

A Final Word: There Is Hope for Your Marriage

You do not have to continue responding to your spouse in the same sinful ways. You may have spent years developing patterns of anger, resentment, defensiveness, or harsh speech. Those patterns do not have to define the remainder of your marriage.

The Lord calls His people to put away sinful conduct and live in a manner consistent with their new life in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that a Christian will never experience anger again. Nor does it mean that every marital disagreement will disappear.

It means that sinful anger does not have to remain the habitual response to life's difficulties.

The purpose of this booklet has been to help you understand the problem. Understanding is important. But understanding should lead to obedience. Obedience to God's Word is the path toward genuine biblical change.

When Understanding the Problem Is Not Enough

Over several decades of biblical counseling, I have helped Christian husbands and wives address recurring arguments, unresolved conflict, and habitual sinful responses. Couples often need more than an explanation of their problems. They need practical biblical instruction for developing new habits of obedience.

For those who desire this kind of structured help, I have written *Recurring Arguments and Unresolved Conflict: An Eight-Week Biblical Marriage Workbook*. It provides a practical, Scripture-based approach to addressing entrenched patterns of conflict and developing new habits in marriage.

[View the Eight-Week Marriage Workbook \(click here\)](#)

About the Author

David M. Tyler, PhD, is a biblical counselor, Christian author, and teacher who has spent several decades helping individuals and married couples understand and apply the Word of God to problems of living. He has personally counseled more than 1,000 married couples and is certified by the International Association of Biblical Counselors.

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