

How the Bible Transforms Anger in Our
Understanding and Experience

the
heart
of

ANGER

CHRISTOPHER ASH & STEVE MIDGLEY

"I found myself jotting down quote after quote as I read through this book filled with so much insight into the Scriptures, as well as insight into human behavior. Then I came to the question, 'What can Christ do for our anger that anger management courses cannot?' and in the pages that followed, I realized I had just struck gold—gospel hope for those who recognize the damage anger is doing in their lives and relationships and their need of a source outside themselves to deal with it."

Nancy Guthrie, Bible teacher; author, *Even Better than Eden*

"This book meets a real need. It gives us a warm, biblical, easily accessible treatment of one of those sins that causes great havoc but is rarely given serious attention. Most of us have suffered the anger of others at one point or another, and most of us can remember times when we failed and lashed out at others. We need to hear what the whole of the Bible has to say about anger, to distinguish between our self-centered anger and God's righteous anger, and to learn strategies to deal with anger in all its forms. Above all, after reading this book, do take the time to work through the immensely practical and helpful appendixes."

Mark D. Thompson, Principal, Moore Theological College

"Imagine being more skillful, less reactive, and humble in the face of your own anger or the anger of others. Imagine how many relationships could find peace and avoid prolonged wars. *The Heart of Anger* guides you there. It is gentle and clear, thorough and hopeful. The illustrations will have you saying, 'That's me.' And it will give you direction today."

Ed Welch, Counselor and Faculty Member, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

"Ash and Midgley have served Christ's church well by treating the subject of anger in a way that is biblically robust and centered on issues of the heart. In addition to learning much about Scripture's emphasis on the role of the inner person in effecting lasting change, readers will also realize the delightful alternative of finding joy and satisfaction in the gospel. Pastors, biblical counselors, and all followers of Christ should have this book on their shelves and these concepts in their hearts and lives."

Steve Viars, Senior Pastor, Faith Church, Lafayette, Indiana; author, *Putting Your Past in Its Place*; *Loving Your Community*; and *Overcoming Bitterness*

“Anger, with all its complexity, is still devastatingly simple. This book captures this paradox perfectly. It describes the multiple factors at play in the heart of a person experiencing anger, and it does so with biblical depth and clarity. An excellent guide to the heart of a person’s anger.”

Jeremy Pierre, Lawrence and Charlotte Hoover Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling and Chair of the Department of Biblical Counseling and Family Ministry, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“What does the Bible say about anger? Not only do Ash and Midgley answer this question exhaustively, but they convincingly gather Scripture’s teaching on anger into four accessible core categories. *The Heart of Anger* is written with pastoral sensitivity, full of personal examples and case studies, and climaxes with a moving description of anger’s antidote: the humility only the gospel of Christ can provide. In addition, Ash and Midgley offer a refreshing insight into the way that listening to Scripture connects us to that humility. In short, *The Heart of Anger* richly and biblically captures our struggle and our hope in the face of the pandemic of prideful anger that has infected us all since the garden.”

J. Alasdair Groves, Executive Director, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

“Anger is a universal human experience and one that often catches us by surprise. *Why* are we so angry? In this Scripture-saturated book, Ash and Midgley help us discern what underlies the many manifestations of our anger, while charting a gospel-centered course for change. What difference does Christ make in our struggle with anger? ‘All the difference in the world,’ say Ash and Midgley. And that is good news indeed for angry folk like you and me!”

Michael R. Emlet, Dean of Faculty and Counselor, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation; author, *Saints, Sufferers, and Sinners* and *CrossTalk*

“Ash and Midgley have written a book on anger that is honest, engaging, convicting, and packed with biblical wisdom. I highly recommend it for Christians who want to understand their heart and Jesus’s heart for them in their own struggle with anger.”

Darby Strickland, Counselor and Teacher, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation; author, *Is It Abuse?*

“*The Heart of Anger* brings together the overlapping realities of our personal anger, the anger of God, and the anger of others, then examines them through the lens of Scripture. Ash and Midgley don’t merely pass along information gleaned from their study; they share what God’s word has to say about these overlapping realities in ways that transform lives. Readers will be equipped to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord in regard to anger and help others to do likewise.”

Curtis Solomon, Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Coalition

“Using biblical and modern case studies, Ash and Midgley show us the devastation that anger causes due to selfish desires. At the heart of anger is a desire to be God, with his knowledge and sovereignty. That sword cuts deeply into all we hold dear. In contrast, the authors show us the righteous anger and steadfast love of the Lord. Knowing Jesus brings us a change of heart, with new desires. Scripture is skillfully applied in specific, practical ways, modeling how to sheath the sword of anger and brandish love and humility instead. Biblical counselors will find true hope for themselves and their counselees here in understanding anger, relationships, and new creation in the Lord.”

Cecelia Bernhardt, Faculty and Director of Counseling, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

The Heart of Anger

How the Bible Transforms Anger in
Our Understanding and Experience

CHRISTOPHER ASH
STEVE MIDGLEY

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
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To
Beth (Steve)

To
Carolyn (Christopher)

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Introduction

Anger and Why It Matters

THIS BOOK ARISES PARTLY out of an experience of failure. The phone rang one Saturday morning. I (Christopher) was due to conduct a wedding that day. It was the bridegroom. "I have called off the wedding." And he had. Late the previous evening he had decided he could not marry his fiancée. She had experienced, as I remember, repeated episodes of red-hot anger. Finally it destroyed the engagement. I have never forgotten the trauma of that day for that young couple and for their families. I wish I understood what had happened. I wish I had been able to help when there was still time. But I didn't, or I couldn't. I failed.

Anger is the drawn sword of human relationships. Before the sword strikes with a sharp word or a violent deed, it is first drawn. Anger is one of those experiences that begins with a feeling and ends with an action; the same anger inhabits the angry feeling and then the angry deed. From the first stirrings of irritation, when the hand begins to move, as it were, to the sword handle as annoyance rises in the heart, to the full-blown fury when the sword is unsheathed and waved threateningly in the air, ready to strike, anger is that in-between emotion that precedes, and finally precipitates, the saying of the word or the doing of the deed.

The sixth commandment says I should not murder; murder makes me liable to the judgment of God. But, says the Lord Jesus, I need to know that malicious anger makes me liable to judgment, for such anger has within it the seeds of murder (Matt. 5:21–22).

Anger is a strange, powerful, confusing, multifaceted phenomenon. It is a drawn sword that leaves a world strewn with casualties. Some reading this book will look back with deep regret, perhaps for yourself, maybe for someone you love, as you remember the role that anger played in destroying a precious relationship. Marriages are broken, love between parents and children is marred, friendships are spoiled, neighborhoods become battlegrounds, workplaces are torn, and whole countries are riven by anger. Some will remember angry words that cannot be unspoken, violent actions that cannot be undone. When the story of destruction and misery is told, anger is often not far away. All over the world at this moment, hands are reaching, as it were, for sword handles, and swords are being drawn.

Our task is to bring the Bible to bear on this drawn sword. We want to understand what causes anger. We need to think about whether, or when, anger can be right. We must ask what can be done about wrong anger.

Rather than picking a few places in the Bible that engage with anger, we want to do our best to bring the whole of the Bible to bear on this question. That is not easy. About ten Hebrew words in the Old Testament are often associated with anger; they come in perhaps seven hundred or so places. In the New Testament there are five Greek words or word groups that bear on our subject, occurring in nearly sixty verses or passages.

But it is not enough to do word searches for the usual anger words, for anger may be present without explicit anger language being used in a narrative. There are none of the usual love words in the parable of the good Samaritan, and yet the story is full of charity and compas-

sion. When Nabal insults David in 1 Samuel 25, and David sets off to kill Nabal and his household, none of the usual anger words appears in the story, and yet it is clear that David is seething with fury. When Moses strikes the rock in Numbers 20, we are not explicitly told he is angry, and yet the narrative makes it clear that he is. So we need to read through the Bible watching for the presence of anger. We have tried to do that as thoroughly as we can. We shall not refer to every one of these very large number of places in the Bible, but our study is based on as comprehensive a survey as we have been able to achieve.

Further, we ought not to focus on anger in isolation, for anger has many cousins. As the catalogues of vices in Romans 1:29–31, Galatians 5:19–21, Ephesians 4:17–32, Colossians 3:5–11, 1 Timothy 1:9–10, 2 Timothy 3:2–5, and elsewhere show us, sinful behavior is like a Sicilian family photograph of the mafia. Anger is there; we can imagine a little circle around the face depicting anger because it is our focus on this book. But further along the row there are “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy . . . rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (to take Galatians 5:19–21 for example). Anger is but one of an ugly mob; we must not forget the cousins.

Yet it’s not only vice and sin that we will find in this family photograph. Sometimes, even though anger is the dominant figure standing tall in the front row, all manner of others are hidden there as well. Look carefully and we will find sadness, regret, shame, and despair tucked in behind. Yet anger is the loud one. The one that attracts all the attention. The one you have to look at because you’re just not sure what it’s about to do. And all those other cousins barely get noticed at all.

PART 1

BIBLICAL PORTRAITS OF HUMAN ANGER

THE FIRST PART OF our study looks through Bible spectacles at the experience of human anger. Theologically, we ought perhaps to begin with the anger of God. But we can only understand the Bible's language about the anger of God when we first have some grasp of the phenomenon of human anger. So we begin with ourselves. The Bible stories in which anger appears are not told specifically in order to teach us about anger; they are a part of the grand Bible story of God's rescue plan in Jesus Christ, and they tell that story above all others. Nevertheless, as they are told by Spirit-inspired writers, they do give us an accurate God's-eye view of human anger. In each one, it is not enough to observe the anger; we need to understand the story of which anger is a part. It is the same when seeking to understand our own anger or the anger of those we seek to help: we need to know the story. The more of the story we know, the better chance we have to understand why anger is present.

One consequence of taking the Bible as our source book for this survey of human anger is that those whose anger is portrayed are

almost exclusively men. Yet anger is, of course, a universal problem that is experienced by women just as much as it is by men. As we have studied what the Bible teaches about human anger, the following four facets have kept coming to the surface: control, possessions, sex, and reputation.

Anger and the Human Heart

THE TRIGGERS THAT SET OFF anger vary. But the rage that is triggered always reveals in some way what the angry person truly values and treasures. Anger rises in my heart when something I value is either threatened or taken from me. If I feel I may lose it, I become angry in anticipation of loss; if I have lost it, I am angered by actual loss. The Bible particularly highlights four kinds of treasure whose loss or threatened loss triggers anger.

1. Control

I make plans. I dream dreams. I want to be able to fulfill my dreams and accomplish my plans. I want to get somewhere quickly. I want to run my department. I want to shape my marriage the way I want it to be. I want to control my family, to be the one in charge. When you get in my way, I get angry. I am angry because you frustrate my control.

In the book of Daniel (and indeed in history) King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is a very angry man. In Daniel 2 the king has a troubling dream. Because he is suspicious that his Department of Magic, his counselors, are pretty good at making up interpretations of dreams, he insists not only that they interpret the dream but that they

first tell him what he has dreamed. That will prove they are genuine magicians! When they protested that this was unreasonably difficult, “the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed” (2:12). In other words, “Here I am, emperor of Babylon, the most powerful man in the world. I am in control, or supposed to be in control, of every man in my empire. But my civil servants are not competent; they say they cannot do what I command.” And so, in deep frustration at the limits of his control, he flies off the handle in an explosion of rage. He draws the sword, and in his anger he strikes, commanding that they all be killed.

In Daniel 3 Nebuchadnezzar demonstrates his awesome control by erecting a huge golden statue and commanding that all his citizens bow before it and worship this image as a demonstration of their submission to his control. But when three Jews refuse to bow to his control, “Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that” they be brought before him (3:13). When they stood before him and refused outright to do what he said, “Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed” against them (3:19). His burning fury is expressed in the burning fiery furnace into which he throws them.

A rather different expression of anger triggered by a lack of control is found in the account of King David bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. He is at the heart of a day of great rejoicing (2 Sam. 6), but in the midst of this celebration, Uzzah behaves irreverently in touching the ark and is struck dead in a terrible outburst of the holiness of God. We shall consider this anger of God in part 2, but for the moment notice the anger of David: “David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah. . . . And David was afraid of the LORD that day” (6:8–9). Notice how David was both angry and afraid. He was angry, it would seem, because his control of this celebration, his happy experience of being the king in charge,

had been spoiled by God's outbreak of anger. And he was also afraid. At the heart of his anger was a love of being in control and the fear of losing that control.

Both Nebuchadnezzar and David get angry because they lose control in the present tense. In other places, the Bible shows how it is the fear of a possible future loss of control that can trigger anger.

King Saul is angry when he sees that his control of the kingdom is threatened by the young David. In 1 Samuel 15–17 we watch the Lord's rejection of King Saul, the anointing of David, and the victory of David over Goliath. At the start of 1 Samuel 18 (vv. 1–5) we see David's military success, and we watch Saul's son and heir Jonathan recognizing that David, rather than Jonathan, ought to succeed Saul as king. And then, as David returns from a military victory, the women of Israel meet King Saul and sing this song:

Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands. (18:7)

Saul knows which way the wind is blowing. He can see that his control of his kingdom is threatened. "And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, 'They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?'" (1 Sam. 18:8). And why is Saul's anger stirred? Because of the threat to his kingdom. He is losing control; he is losing his dignity as king; he is losing power. A kingdom that he believed was his to control is slipping from his grasp, and it infuriates him that he feels powerless to prevent it.

In the book that bears his name, Nehemiah returns from exile to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 1–3). This wall will symbolize a new identity for the people of God. Not everyone is pleased by this, for it threatens the fiefdoms of local warlords who have enjoyed considerable delegated control of the area under the power of the Persian Empire.

One of these is Sanballat (2:10, 19). “Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall,” writes Nehemiah, “he was angry and greatly enraged” (4:1). Sanballat is angry because his control is threatened.

A rather different expression of anger in the face of lost control is found in the account of Jonah’s mission to Nineveh. In chapter 4 of Jonah’s prophecy, we find Jonah in what might best be described as something akin to a teenage sulk. Jonah has taken himself up a hill east of Nineveh to see what will happen to the city. When it becomes clear that the forty days have passed without the promised judgment, Jonah is furious. Only now do we finally discover what motivated Jonah’s desperate flight to Tarshish. He had always suspected that God, being slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, would indeed relent and not bring the judgment he had promised. But this was not what Jonah wanted, so he did what he could to take control. He fled so that judgment wouldn’t be preached and the opportunity for repentance never take place. But one storm and one whale later, Jonah’s hand was forced, and salvation came to the city. Yet instead of joy at repentance, there is fury at his own lack of control.

We can understand the frightened anger of a Saul or a Sanballat; even, perhaps, the sulky moodiness of a Jonah. But it’s much harder to identify with the infanticidal rage that comes centuries later in the beginnings of the New Testament. Jesus is born “in the days of Herod the king” (Matt. 2:1). Wise men come to Jerusalem and ask, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” When Herod the king hears of a new king, he is first “troubled” (2:1–3); later, when the wise men refuse to participate in his cruel trickery, and he sees that they have tricked him, he becomes “furious” and kills all the little boys in Bethlehem and its surroundings (2:16). The root of his fury, as of Saul’s anger and Sanballat’s rage, is a threat to his control.

These men demonstrate on a large scale what you and I experience on the smaller scale of our own lives. We may be angry because we

have lost some control that we value, or we may be enraged because we fear we may lose that control. But whether the anger is triggered by a present loss of control or a threatened loss of control, it is the treasured control that lies at the root of our anger.

2. Possessions

Possessions are closely linked to control. When I own something, I control it; it is mine. I can do with it what I choose. The desire for possessions can lead to anger when frustrated. At the start of the terrible story of King Ahab and Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21, King Ahab eyes up Naboth's vineyard. He wants it; he desires that it shall be his to possess. The king offers to buy it, but Naboth refuses, for it is his inheritance in the promised land. We read, "So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors'" (21:4 NIV). In our English translations Ahab is "sullen and angry" (NIV), "vexed and sullen" (ESV), "resentful and sullen" (NRSV), or "resentful and angry" (CSB). It is clear that frustration has boiled over into a slow anger in his heart.

The drawn sword of Ahab's sullen vexation will lead, as the story unfolds, to the most terrible murder. But the roots of the anger lie in the frustrated desire for possessions. In our experience also, the longing to own things may, when obstructed, lead to anger. At the very lowest level, even the words "it's out of stock" can begin to make us reach for our swords in frustration: "Why is it out of stock? But I want it, and I want it NOW!"

3. Sexual Intimacy and Delight

Both men and women place a high value on sexual delight. When warning a young man against sleeping with another man's wife, the wisdom of Proverbs says:

He who commits adultery lacks sense;
 he who does it destroys himself.
 He will get wounds and dishonor,
 and his disgrace will not be wiped away.
 For jealousy makes a man furious,
 and he will not spare when he takes revenge.
 He will accept no compensation;
 he will refuse though you multiply gifts. (Prov. 6:32–35)

The value that married people rightly place on exclusive intimacy with their spouse is so high that when it is stolen by an adulterer, their anger will know no bounds. Adulterers need to know that they are taking away an intimacy of inestimable value and that no monetary gift can compensate for that theft.

In a different and much darker way, we see anger prompted by sex in the terrible story of Amnon's rape of his half-sister, the beautiful Tamar (2 Sam. 13). Amnon becomes obsessed with Tamar. He dreams of the sexual delight he will enjoy with her. He tricks her, forces himself on her, and rapes her. And we're told that immediately after the rape, "Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love [i.e., lust] with which he had loved her [i.e., lusted after her]" (13:15). Why this intense hatred? After all, he has sated his lust upon her. So what reason is there to hate her with this angry hatred? He imagined that having her would bring delight. He felt sure that realizing his desire would feel good and satisfying. Yet the reality, it seems, was rather different. For in the absence of intimacy, sexual activity never gives the delight and satisfaction it is intended to provide. Amnon may have had her body, but he certainly didn't have her heart. Quite the opposite. She despised him for what he had done to her. In the madness of his desire, he somehow seemed to imagine that sleeping

with her would make him feel good. Instead it simply left him humiliated because it is clear that he wasn't desired by her at all. And in his humiliation, rather like a spoiled child, he responded with fury.

So in their very different ways, both the righteous anger of a wronged husband and the desperately evil and twisted anger of a disappointed rapist serve to evidence the very high value we place on sexual delight. The connection between anger and sex, both in marriages and in extramarital relationships, is terrifyingly close.

4. Reputation

Wounded pride is another common root of anger. I value my reputation, my name, and the high esteem in which I hope others will hold me. It matters to me that people think well of me. When anything happens that threatens that high regard, anger is close at hand. Four Bible examples will serve to illustrate this.

The first is the strange story of the pagan prophet Balaam and his donkey. Balaam rides with the leaders of Moab, but the angel of the Lord stands in the path to block his way. His donkey sees the angel, with his sword drawn, and will not go on. Despite repeated blows from Balaam, the donkey refuses to continue on the path. In the end, the donkey simply sits down on the ground with Balaam seated on him. It is a funny scene. But it is no joke to Balaam. The donkey has made a fool of him, and he is very angry. When the Lord opens the mouth of the donkey, the donkey says to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" That is to say, "Why are you angry? What is causing your anger?" To which Balaam replies, "Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you" (Num. 22:21–29). Balaam wishes that the metaphorical drawn sword of anger was a literal drawn sword. He is angry because his reputation has been damaged. He has been made to look, and feel, like a fool.

My second example is the story of the man (presumably nicknamed) Nabal (which means “fool” in Hebrew) and David in 1 Samuel 25. David sends his young men in peace to this bad-tempered landowner and asks for help in finding provisions for his band of men. Nabal angrily refuses and asks, “Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat . . . and give it to men who come from I do not know where?” (25:10–11). He insults David. When his young men return to David bearing this insult, “David [says] to his men, ‘Every man strap on his sword!’” and sets out to take angry revenge for this insult (25:13). David is angry because his reputation has been questioned: “Who is David?”

For our third example we move forward to the reign of King Uzziah of Judah many years later. For all his greatness and longevity as a king, “when [Uzziah] was strong, he grew proud.” He goes into the temple and abrogates to himself the prerogative of the priests to burn incense. Azariah the priest bravely resists him with a group of other priests. “Then Uzziah was angry” (2 Chron. 26:16–19). The story does not end well for Uzziah. But the point for us to note is that his anger is so very closely connected with his pride. When his pride is dented by these righteous priests, he gets angry.

My final biblical example is another very angry man, King Xerxes or Ahasuerus, the Persian emperor at the time of the book of Esther. The king commands that his beautiful queen, Vashti, come into the hall of banqueting men “in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at” (Est. 1:11). The king wants to show her off, to prove to the other men that his girl was the most gorgeous. There is nothing secret about his request; he sends seven of his senior eunuchs to relay this command to the queen. The whole banqueting hall of men knows he has sent this message. “Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command.

. . . At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him” (1:12). It is not hard to understand why he was so cross; he had been very publicly snubbed. His reputation was badly damaged. In our day, the tweet #vashtisaidno would go viral; all over the empire, people would be laughing at this ridiculous emperor. And so he is very angry, dangerously angry.

As we observed earlier, it is male examples of anger that predominate in Scripture. Yet as we begin to consider the underlying causes for our anger, it soon becomes clear that the drivers for anger are common to both men and women. Cultural pressures may, perhaps, lead to a few differences in the way anger is expressed in men and women, but when we consider the way men and women both experience and express their anger, the similarities outweigh the differences.

The Reasons for Anger

A survey of these common triggers of anger—a love of control, a desire for possessions, the high value we place on sexual intimacy, and our proud treasure of our reputation—leads us to consider the rational dimension of anger. There are reasons for anger. Anger has, as Matthew Elliott has forcefully argued in his book *Faithful Feelings*, a cognitive dimension. Anger is not simply a raging force that comes to us from outside and just happens to us. There is a process. Drawing on the work of the philosopher William Lyons, Elliott expounds a process like this:¹

1. Perception. I see or hear something. I grasp that something is happening to me, or might happen to me. My donkey won’t go

¹ Matthew Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 31–42. Elliott is drawing from William Lyons, *Emotion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

where I tell it; this man won't sell me his vineyard; the girl won't give me satisfaction; the new king threatens my control. Whatever it may be, I first perceive that this is happening.

2. Appraisal. I evaluate what is happening. I decide whether I like it or not. I do not like my donkey making a fool of me, this man not selling me what I want, the girl not satisfying me, the new king threatening my control. So I move from perception (watching what is happening) to appraisal (deciding whether or not I like it).

3. Emotion. I then feel in a way that is appropriate to my perception and my appraisal. If I do not like it, more than that, if I feel somehow affronted by it, I begin to feel anger. My heart beats faster; my blood pressure rises; I flush, I get hot under the collar; I tremble with rage.

To the extent that this rational sequence expresses the phenomenon of anger, it raises the moral question: Am I right to value what is being taken from me or threatened? And therefore, am I right to be angry? This moral question is asked by the Lord of Cain in Genesis 4: "Why are you angry?" (Gen. 4:6); and of Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry?" (Jonah 4:4, 9 NIV). In each case the Lord's question points back to the roots of anger: For what reason are you angry? What is it you so value that its threatened loss makes you angry? Are you right to value it as you do?

In his great book *The City of God*, Augustine (called by Andrew Cameron, "arguably Christianity's first and most significant theoretician of human emotion") wrote this:

Within our discipline, then, we do not so much ask whether a pious soul is angry, as why he is angry; not whether he is sad, but whence comes his sadness; not whether he is afraid, but what he fears. For I do not think that any right-minded person would condemn anger

directed at a sinner in order to correct him; or sadness on behalf of one who is afflicted, in order to comfort him; or fear for one in peril, lest he perish.²

This change of focus from *whether* people are angry to *why* they are angry is the key. Anger reveals something in the human heart. It both shows what one values and treasures and also reveals something of one's attitude to God. This then raises the questions: Am I right so to treasure this? And am I right to treat God this way? When faced with the experience of anger, we find that it is drawing back the curtains to reveal the workings of our heart. And it is to these attitudes of the heart that we now turn.

2 Augustine, *Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 365.

WE ALL STRUGGLE WITH ANGER AT TIMES: Our plans suddenly fall through, we lose a prized possession, or our reputation is called into question. More often than not, when anger knocks at the doors of our hearts we easily allow it to take over. But what if getting to the heart of our anger also reveals the way to transform it?

Christopher Ash and Steve Midgley address this question by bringing to bear what the whole Bible has to say about sinful anger—revealing that anger is the sinful response when something we value more than God is taken away or threatened. They reflect on biblical portraits of human anger, God’s righteous anger, and how only the gospel of Jesus Christ brings true freedom—transforming a heart of anger into a heart filled with the love of God.

“Imagine being more skillful, less reactive, and humble in the face of your own anger or the anger of others. Imagine how many relationships could find peace and avoid prolonged wars. *The Heart of Anger* guides you there. It is gentle and clear, thorough and hopeful. The illustrations will have you saying, ‘That’s me.’ And it will give you direction today.”

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“*The Heart of Anger* brings together the overlapping realities of our personal anger, the anger of God, and the anger of others, then examines them through the lens of Scripture. Readers will be equipped to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord in regard to anger and help others to do likewise.”

CURTIS SOLOMON, Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Coalition

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