It's Not a Matter of 'If' but 'When'

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Preface

Not a Matter of 'If' but 'When' was born out of my personal journey in overcoming anger. Along the way, I discovered a life-changing truth: I don't have to be controlled by anger. I can, with God's help, control it.

I also learned there are both right and wrong things to be angry about. Righteous anger has its place, but destructive anger only steals peace and damages relationships. Through Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I discovered how to live victoriously over anger. Honestly, I wish I had learned these lessons much sooner.

I hope that as you read these pages, you'll be challenged and encouraged to face your own battles with anger, and to overcome them sooner rather than later. It's not easy, but it's worth it. The freedom and peace that come from responding to God's way are worth every step of the journey.

Not a Matter of 'If' but 'When'

Introduction

This afternoon, after church, we came home and, as we do every Sunday with our family, we ate leftovers. No cooking occurs on Sundays; everyone fends for themselves. I had set aside two hot dogs (I know, bad choice), but my husband announced he wanted them. He was willing to give me one and take the other. No, I wanted both and felt a bit put out. It wasn't a matter of if I would get angry, but rather when. I wasn't angry for long because I was too hungry to care. I foraged until I found something else. As I think about it, it's ridiculous to get angry over a hot dog.

Why do we get so bent out of shape at the drop of a hat? Often over trivial things?

It's not a matter of if we will get angry, but when. Some express it less than others until all the pent-up anger inside explodes one day. Although anger is a common human emotion that is often dismissed as a regular part of life, it can also be destructive if not handled appropriately.

When you are angry, do not sin, and be sure to stop being angry before the end of the day.

Ephesians 4:26 NCV

It's not a matter of if, we will get angry

I formed the opinion early in life that anger, in any form, was wrong. When I felt angry, I believed I needed to hide it because anger was unacceptable. I didn't understand that one could feel anger without sinning or being wrong. I grew up in an era where emotions were not often managed healthily. Therefore, if something was deemed "wrong," you weren't supposed to experience it. This led to the belief that feeling angry made you inherently wrong. I lived with anger simmering just below the surface, and it was exhausting to keep it in check. This also made me feel I was wrong and that I needed to apologize, even when there was no real reason. I didn't know how to confront the anger that lurked beneath the surface. Eventually, that anger had to be released. Finally, I would lash out at those closest to me when I could no longer contain it. This always ended badly, hurting both my loved ones and myself in the process. It wasn't a good time.

This kind of anger leads us to sin and wrongdoing. Anger directed at others, especially those unrelated to the root cause of our frustration, is misplaced. This anger stems from a need to control situations to avoid further pain. I felt out of control and was grasping at straws to regain my balance, but it didn't work. I felt threatened and fearful, and I reacted in anger when things weren't going well (in my opinion). I needed to be in control.

Not a matter of if I was angry, I was angry, but at the wrong thing

I felt angry because I believed my way was best. I needed to **protect myself** from being hurt again. Additionally, I felt justified in my anger due to my emotional wounds. This made me feel entitled, leading everyone to tread lightly around me. It was my pride that fueled my anger. Was I hurt? Did I have unresolved issues? Yes! However, those issues did not give me the right to lash out at anyone and everyone at any time. I was directing my anger at the wrong things and the wrong people.

When someone is hurting, as I was, it's not uncommon for them to unconsciously feel a need for control. This may manifest as obsessive behavior or, as it did with me, as anger. My pride prevented me from admitting that I was wrong. I was in pain; I couldn't accept being wrong (or so I thought at the time), but I was. Those who loved me weren't the ones with the problem; I was. I was angry, and my resentment for past hurt was directed at those who weren't responsible for my pain. They were simply the most convenient target.

What's next?

It's easy to ask, "So, what's next? I need to know how to fix this quickly." Before we can move on to what's next and prevent the day from ending in anger, we must acknowledge that there is a right way and a wrong way to deal with anger.

You may feel hopeless because you've tried many times and failed to prevent yourself from exploding at those around you. However, there is hope if we make some adjustments. Consider this possibility: instead of viewing it as a

matter of "if" but "when" we will get angry, think of it not as a matter of "if" but "when" we can free ourselves from anger's grasp.

Anger that creates distance between us, God, and our loved ones can indicate that something is wrong. In these lessons, we will explore ways to manage anger and repair our relationships with God and others.

Consider

Do you find yourself getting angry quickly? Do petty issues set you off?

Have you found it challenging to hold your temper more often than not?

Do your loved ones feel the need to maintain peace around you? Do they "walk on eggshells" to avoid making you angry?

Prayer

Lord, help me understand why I am so angry and identify what triggers it. Thank You for supporting me in refraining from lashing out at those around me. I believe You are guiding me to recognize the things that provoke my anger and to address the issues that have led to this behavior. I pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 1

How to Be Angry and Stay on Track

What does the Bible mean when it says we can be angry but not sin? Anger, when not channeled constructively, is destructive. When improperly directed, anger seeks someone to blame. This behavior is rooted in pride, as no one wants to be wrong. Everyone wants to be right.

In our introduction to our teaching, *Not a Matter of 'If' but 'When,* we opened the proverbial "can of worms" with a discussion about **anger**. **Anger** is a natural human emotion that we all experience at some point. However, the cost associated with anger can be high. Most of us can attest to its destructive potential. Wars have been ignited due to **anger**, couples have divorced because of it, and individuals have been hurt by words spoken in **anger**. How can we control such a potentially harmful emotion?

When you are angry, do not sin, and be sure to stop being angry before the end of the day.

Ephesians 4:26-27 NCV

The book of **Ephesians** teaches that it is **possible** to be **angry** without **sinning**. What exactly does that

mean? **Anger**, if not channeled properly, can be destructive. When misdirected, anger seeks someone to blame. This stems from **pride,** as no one wants to be wrong; everyone wants to be right.

He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Genesis 3:11-13 ESV

A hallmark of **anger** can be traced back to early human history: **the tendency to shift blame.** Our anger is often misdirected when we fall short, and we project the blame for our faults onto others. Notice from **Genesis 3:11-13** how blame was shifted:

Adam blamed Eve, who blamed the serpent.

No one admitted to their faults. Did Eve offer the fruit to Adam? Yes. But did he have to take it? No. Did the serpent tempt Eve? Yes. But she did not have to give in to the temptation. **Anger** is often found where sin lies hidden, either because of sin committed against someone or by someone. The result is the same: sin brings with it a basketful of trouble.

Before we can conquer **anger**, we must first **overcome our pride, humble ourselves**, and admit our faults. Imagine if Adam or Eve, or both, had acknowledged their guilt when God held them accountable; history could have taken a different turn.

Once we conquer our pride, we can also conquer our **anger**. Now, let us focus on the main text from the book of **Ephesians**:

When you are angry, do not sin, and be sure to stop being angry before the end of the day.
Ephesians 4:26,27 NCV

1. **Be angry, but don't sin**. What is sin? Sin is translated from the Greek word "Hamartanó," which means "to miss the mark." It is used in **Romans 3:23 NKJV** *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* When sin enters the human experience, its result is our falling short of what is required by God and His glory.
2. **What kind of anger is not sinful?** There is a kind of anger that God wants us to possess. We need to be angry over **sin** and its destructive power over people.
3. **God hates sin.** Not simply because He is holy. God hates sin because it damages those He loves: us, His creation. Consider the following verse:

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.
Isaiah 30:18 ESV

4. **Why would God wait?** Is there something wrong with Him? Or does He wait for us to get ready? God wants to show us mercy; He has no desire for anyone to perish (see **2 Peter 3:9**).

What is worth the energy?

I had a wise mother. She used to say, "There are few things worth the energy spent on getting angry." The older I've become, the more I've understood the meaning of her words. As I noted previously, anger often arises from feeling out of control. When things are out of control, we wish to restore them to their proper state. The price we pay for trying to control everyone and everything is the risk of isolating ourselves from those who love us most, as our anger drives them away. We have limited control over many aspects of the world. However, we can control **how we respond** to events. While we cannot control what someone says, we can choose how to react.

Keep your heart

What we allow to take root in our hearts will determine what comes out of our mouths (see **Matthew 12:34**). This is why it is essential to fill ourselves with God's Word. The **Word of God** can only work in us to the degree that it dwells in our hearts. When our hearts are filled with God, there is little room for anything else.

When events occur or words are spoken that provoke your anger, what is your immediate reaction? How much effort do you put into "guarding your heart?"

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.

Proverbs 4:23 NKJV

The solution

The solution for managing **anger** begins with a "heart check." The state of our hearts determines the direction of our lives. If our hearts are devoid of God and His Word, we are at the mercy of our emotions' whims. Emotions can change unexpectedly. Everything is fine one moment; the next, we find ourselves **angry** over something someone has said, or we have seen or heard.

Our hearts need protection, which comes from us paying close attention to what we put inside them. A daily discipline of spending time reading God's Word, praying, and worshipping is essential for maintaining a healthy heart. If we have antibiotics prescribed or are taking blood pressure medication, we take them according to the doctor's orders. It's not a matter of "if" we will take our medication but "when." We find it easy to neglect the most important prescription: a daily dose of God and His Word.

Where or when to begin?

If you aren't sure where or when to start, or if it's been a while since you've engaged in personal devotional time, think about beginning with the Gospel of John. Read a chapter each day and gradually increase the time you spend reading. Add another chapter by starting with Psalms. The possibilities are endless. You can also find many year-long Bible reading plans online on sites like YouVersion or BibleGateway. I personally follow a plan I discovered in Wayne Cordeiro's book, *The Divine Mentor*. Make sure to utilize all these wonderful resources; your life will change for the better.

As we grow in our relationship with God and His

Word, our time spent reading it transforms us. Our interaction with God shifts from reading the Word to allowing the Word to read us (a point from *The Divine Mentor*). The doors of our hearts begin to open to God through His Word, prompting changes within us and adjusting our posture. This marks the beginning of the solution. Without God's Word, we will continue to struggle and attempt to manage our anger through a "white-knuckle" approach. Essentially, we will simply try to control it until we can no longer do so.

Follow along in the next lesson for more.

Consider

Are you filling your heart with God's Word daily?

If you're struggling to keep up with a consistent devotional time, what are the things that hinder you from being consistent?

Are you open to having God's Word read you instead of you reading it?

Prayer

Lord, I ask You to help me become more consistent in spending time with You in Your Word and prayer. Help me develop the discipline needed to grow in my devotional life. I realize that I will continue to struggle without spending time with You. I don't want to face these struggles without You, Lord. Today, I surrender ownership of my life. Thank You for Your mercy and grace, and I declare that it's not a matter of "if" I will spend time with You, but "when." Help me find my "when!" I pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 2

Continue Reading

Thank you for reading this preview of *Not a Matter of If but When*.

In the full resource, we continue exploring:

- The Target of Anger
- The Need to Forgive Others
- The Need to Forgive Ourselves
- The End of Defeat
- The End of Anger

If Chapter 1 resonated with you, the journey is just beginning.

The question is not whether anger will come. The question is what we will do when it does.

Continue reading:

Purchase the Full Resource

About Lea

Lea Peters is a missionary, writer, and Bible teacher who has served in Africa alongside her husband, Jamie, for almost 40 years. Together they have planted churches, trained leaders, and shared the hope of Christ through practical ministry across several African nations.

Passionate about helping people grow in their relationship with God, she enjoys encouraging others through biblical teaching, discipleship, and writing. Her desire is to help readers apply God's Word to everyday life and discover the freedom, grace, and spiritual growth found in Christ.

Together, Jamie and Lea have four children and two grandchildren. In addition to their ministry through Africa & Beyond, she writes at A Cultural Shift, where she explores faith, culture, missions, family, and spiritual growth.

Africa & Beyond: https://africa-and-beyond.com/

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