

## Lyfe Guide to living without anger

When was the last time you encountered anger? If you have any dealings with a toddler, you will find it easily provoked by the single syllabled word, “No”: there is nothing quite as dramatic as a toddler screaming and thrashing on the floor having been denied a second Petit Filous. Perhaps you made the mistake of driving in rush hour and became the target of someone’s road-rage, or you work in a customer service department of a company that doesn’t issue refunds. It seems that in our fast-paced, stressed-out world, many people are one small hiccough away from an explosion of bad temper. Can we as apprentices of Jesus hope to be any different?

Dallas Willard writes, ‘*anger is in its own right- quite apart from “acting it out” and further consequences- an injury to others. When I discover your anger at me, I am already wounded.*’ (The Divine Conspiracy) He goes on to say that it may be enough to change my course, to stress out those nearby, and to provoke me to anger in return. There is always a part of anger that desires to harm its object, and when it is not immediately dismissed (or “laid aside” as Paul puts it in Colossians 3:8) it can be deadly. In America each year there are around 25,000 murders and a million people are attacked by people they work with. I am sure it is not far-fetched to suggest the vast majority of these incidents were motivated by anger.

Anger, at its most basic, is a spontaneous reaction- a physical feeling- that hits us when our will is opposed or our life interfered with. It is not wrong in and of itself; a major cause of depression in women is suppressed or diverted anger, and Christians are sometimes the worst at recognising it when it happens because they are trying so hard to be nice. Because it is a spontaneous reaction, we can’t hope to ever be entirely free of it. But we can hope for a life that is not controlled by it, for a character that resists the urge to nurture it, for an understanding of God’s forgiveness of us that goes deep enough to spur us on to forgive the wrong that is done to us and curtail our schemes for revenge. Ephesians 4:26 and 27 says, “Don’t get so angry that you sin. Don’t go to bed angry and don’t give the devil a chance.” We can decide whether to let our anger thrive or shrivel, and we can choose how to act on it.

The antidote to anger is love. Jesus knew well the power of love to halt anger in its tracks. If we obey his radical call to “love your enemies and pray for those who mistreat you,” (Matthew 5: 44) we will find our lives take an entirely different shape. Anger will not be able to destroy us. The devil will have no chance.