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ANGER

*Put on your new nature, created to be like God—
truly righteous and holy. And “don’t sin by
letting anger control you.”*

*Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry,
for anger gives a foothold to the devil.*

□ Ephesians 4:24, 26–27

I COULD feel my love growing cold. I hated how I felt inside, and yet everything in me wanted to build a wall around my heart so there would be no more hopes or expectations to fall dead at my feet. But a walled-off heart makes for a heavy load. Eventually, your legs give out from under you.

Being a woman of God, I spent a lot of time every morning in Scripture and in prayer; I loved to worship God and serve in my church. I had an active walk of faith and yet the honest truth was that my love for my husband was fading, and I was only dragging my feet down the path of duty.

How could I reconcile loving God but not my husband? I couldn’t. As a child of God, I knew I could not compartmentalize such things and get away with it for very long. Gradually, my



attitude toward my husband spilled over into other areas of my life. Little things irritated me more than they should. I assumed certain people had malicious motives when they probably didn't. And worst of all, God's voice grew more and more quiet with each passing day.

God wasn't moving away from me, of course, but I was moving away from Him. We know we can't have it both ways. We can't love God and dislike people. The *Peanuts* character Linus once said, "I love mankind—it's people I can't stand!" That sentiment may be humorous, but God won't let us off with such a conclusion. Jesus declared the most important commandment to be that we love God with everything in us. He continued by saying, "A second is *equally* important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:39).

Through the early years of our marriage, we dealt with many trials—health issues being the greatest—and because we had poor insurance, we found ourselves in deep financial debt. Amidst all of this my husband was a rock and worked hard, sometimes two or three jobs to keep us afloat.

Eventually though, our long season of back-to-back crises subsided, and we began the hard work of rebuilding our lives. Over the years, we paid back more than twenty thousand dollars worth of medical debt. Day after day, month after month, year after year, we applied ourselves to getting on our feet again.

Some days we felt weary and worn out and wondered if we were making any forward progress at all. But always at the right time, God mercifully encouraged us onward. He even put it in the hearts of a couple of our debtors to forgive our debts. Several times we received gifts from loving friends. We also worked hard and saved enough to build a new home and start fresh. All of this



took time, but it was well worth the effort. That season was so painful it took years before I could look back on those memories without getting a pit in my stomach.

God faithfully led us through the wilderness. *And yet*, even though time had passed and life was better for us, and even though we were no longer in crisis mode, my husband worked as though we were. He became a true-blue workaholic.

Life became a blur as Kevin raced through life. I knew there was no way to get that time back. As my husband spent more and more time at work, he left more and more undone at home. The ripple effect of his choices created waves of anxiety that continually stirred within me.

Several times throughout our married life, Kevin faced the truth that he tended to trust himself more than God. Upon each revelation, he felt sincerely sorry and determined to live a more balanced life that included time to manage our home life and time with the family. And yet eventually these seasons always passed, and Kevin was back to racing through life like a freight train.

A time came when our church needed someone to head up the building program. Kevin took on that role on top of his forty- to fifty-hour day job. He was excited about the prospect of serving God in a big way, and this role fit his talents perfectly.

Kevin jumped in with both feet, and within no time, things shifted and our marriage went way out of balance. There was no room in our already crowded marriage for a twenty- to twenty-five-hour a week commitment. We had three sons; I was working part-time as an aerobics instructor, and speaking occasionally at retreats and conferences, all the while trying to keep the dishes, the laundry, and the housework done; and together we were overseeing the youth program at our church (crazy, I know). I must



confess this is a very humbling story for us to share.

Kevin was all but absent from home. And when he was home, he was on the phone, working on the computer, or buried in blueprints. The kids and I talked to the side of his face while he opened the mail. Still, when we did get his attention, he was the sweetest and kindest guy in the world.

In his defense, he really felt inspired that he was doing something worthwhile. In his day job, he oversees large construction projects. So to volunteer time overseeing the building of a church was very meaningful to him. And once the job grew before our eyes, he felt he could not abandon his post. People were depending on him, and the excitement was building (no pun intended). I felt that he chose the building over me. Not that I wanted him to quit or walk away from the project; I just wanted him to invest *some* time into the things he was neglecting at home.

I worked hard to keep a good attitude, especially in front of the kids, but since there were little to no emotional deposits being made into our marriage for months at a time, our relationship was steadily going bankrupt. Slowly but surely, my disappointment turned to anger that eventually turned to cold love.

One day while crying out to God and begging Him to intervene, He spoke very clearly to my heart. *Susie, I know Kevin is overcommitted and missing it right now, but you are the one who has committed the greater sin. Though Kevin's priorities are off and need some adjusting, he is still very much in love with you and the boys. You've committed the worse offense, because you've allowed your love to grow cold. I want you to go sit at his feet and apologize for this sin and ask him for forgiveness. If you want to fulfill all of the wonderful things I've called you to, you will walk in humble forgiveness all of the days of your life.*



I was aghast. I thought back to countless conversations, trying to get through to Kevin, and all I could see was a blank stare that told me, *I won't change my schedule until this project is done*. So to go to him and apologize seemed like the most vulnerable, unfair thing to do. If anything, my anger had become my friend. I had let go of the hope of him changing, and my anger *fueled* me to get done what needed to get done.

But I love and fear the Lord and have surrendered my life to Him. He always deserves my obedience. As I spent more time pondering how my love had grown cold, I thought of the countless selfish acts I had committed. I gave Kevin the small piece of chicken, the bumpy pillow, and sometimes I would go to bed without saying good night. I stopped thinking his jokes were funny and I lost my desire to dream with him. Not only, I am sure, had I hurt my husband, but my lack of love was a direct affront to my gracious and merciful God.

I did not want to live with anger! But to go and lay it down at the feet of my husband with no hope or promise that he would see what it cost me seemed almost over my head. I prayed for several days for my own selfish heart—that God would prepare me in all sincerity—and that God would prepare my husband as well.

After dinner one night I went into the living room where Kevin was looking at his notes from a recent meeting. I swallowed hard and sat on the floor by his feet. I looked up at him and he looked right into my eyes. He put his notes down as if he knew I had something important to say.

I opened my mouth to say my first word and my eyes filled with tears. I proceeded. “I need to ask your forgiveness for something. You know I’ve been very hurt and angry over how things have gone these past two years. Well, the Lord showed me that



between the two of us, I am the one who has committed the greater offense; I've allowed my love to grow cold. Please forgive me. Though my feelings toward you have changed, I am going to make a conscious effort to love and serve you whether you understand me or not. I want all of what God has for me and I am going to do what He asks me to do."

As I spoke, Kevin's mouth dropped open. It was as if with each word I spoke, another scale fell from his eyes. After I finished, his voice cracked and he asked, "Is *this* what my choices have been doing to you?" I put my face in my hands and wept. It was like a dam broke and I couldn't stop it. Kevin came down on the floor and wrapped me in his arms. There we sat, on the same level, two very imperfect people, desperately in need of God's fresh mercies and grace.

From that day forward I kept my word and made the conscious effort to love my husband while he struggled to overcome his workaholic tendencies. And to be honest, there were days when love was simply a choice. Over time, though, we were able to share our deep-seated fears and disappointments. Little by little we made deposits in an account that had been emptied. We now put strict boundaries around our time and we tenaciously guard our date nights.

Years have passed and I can honestly say that when I look at my husband, I find love in my heart that almost overwhelms me. He is funny and strong and faithful. He has worked hard to make choices that have covered our home and rebuilt my trust. I see God actively working in him, and he sees God actively working in me.

Now please let me say that every situation is different (and complex) in its own way and obedience looks different on everyone. In some situations anger is an appropriate response. At that



moment in the living room, obedience for me was to bow low; for you at this moment, to obey may be to stand strong.¹ Even so, for all of us, the outcome is in God's hands.

I have the opportunity to speak to countless women and my heart just breaks every time I hear a new story of pain and frustration. Their tired eyes reveal the burden and the load they are carrying.

Jane is dealing with her husband's addiction to pornography. Melanie is watching her husband's obsession with computer games eat up all of their family time. Julie takes life a day at a time as her husband goes from one consuming hobby to another.

Please remember that you are not alone. Many women feel what you feel and long for the same sense of joy and freedom in their lives that you do. Take a few steps within your own sphere of influence and you'll find other women carrying a burden they hadn't planned on carrying.

Some are dealing with the wretched pain of infidelity and wonder how they will ever trust anyone again. Others are dealing with the drain of living with someone bound by an addiction.

Many women deal with the constant anxiety of being married to a spouse who cannot keep a job; others ride the roller coaster of living with a loved one who struggles with depression. Some have learned to walk on eggshells because of their spouse's obsessions. Others wish their spouses would notice *something* and snap out of their apathy.

Moving Day should have been a clue. I stood on the steps of our new home with a three-month-old on my hip and an inquisitive three-year-old darting around moving men and boxes. My husband was not there; he was on call. I did not



know my neighbors and no family members lived nearby. I felt very alone.

Relocating five states away for my husband's medical residency seemed like a good idea. We chose our program carefully, looking for one with low call the first year. "One night a week" was the description. The actual program did not fit the description, and he had a call schedule of one in every three nights. My husband was gone one night, sleeping the next, and present but grumpy on the third night. I often described this year as feeling that I had a live-in boyfriend rather than a husband. He showed up randomly and did not participate in home life, parenting, or church hunting.

After fifteen months, I began sliding into a deep depression. My attempts at talking to my husband were not received well. He worked over eighty hours a week and just wanted me to "get it together." He did not have the time or emotional resources to handle my problems. I had no close friends or older women in whom I could confide. I did not spend time in prayer or Bible study. I waited for all of my needs to be met by my very busy husband.

The emotional stress mounted until I suffered a complete breakdown. When I was encouraged to enter a hospital for treatment, my husband and I settled on a different plan. He took a leave of absence from work and we began counseling together.

My husband realized that a career was not worth losing a wife and children. He committed to making family a priority. I admitted that I needed to look to God to meet my emotional and spiritual needs rather than to my husband. No man can fill the needs intended to be met by God.



Stressful times magnify what is in a marriage—or better or worse. Our crisis revealed the worst, and we chose to let God change us. My husband now has the compassion and understanding to treat depressed patients in his family practice. I teach women's Bible studies and look for young mothers who need mentoring as I did, and because of my experiences, I'm able to direct them to God and His Word to meet their needs.

—Emma from Texas

Some wives deal with the stress of having a materialistic, perfectionist for a spouse; they are in debt up to their eyeballs and would give anything for a simpler, free life. Other wives are worn out from living with husbands who are messy pack rats and only dream about having a sense of order in the home. All of these imbalances create a burden for the spouse, and anger is a natural by-product when these kinds of stresses occur.

And yet as real as these struggles are and as hopeless as things sometimes feel, even more real and steadfast is this promise: God will *never* forsake His own; and we are His own. Our spouses may get caught up in many things that will directly affect our lives. They may make choices that devastate us. We may feel completely misunderstood at times. But we must not despair because God understands and He has made a way for us.



Are you carrying weights that drag you down? Is one of them anger? If you are angry, it's possible you have a good reason. You may feel especially entitled to your anger. But do you know how dangerous unresolved anger can be? Is anger worth having along when you know it gives the Devil easy access to your life? Please



SPIRITUAL LIFT:

“Underneath our every step are God’s everlasting arms. Thus, when we pass through spiritual conflicts and trials, we are walking on eternal ground, continually kept by the power of Christ’s indestructible life.”

□ *Francis Frangipane*²

know that he wants to blow up and injure everything and everyone around you.

Anger can make us cold; it can make us hot; it can take us off the path, or it can blow our path to smithereens. Anger is natural, but it needs to be disarmed. Would you dare pack explosives before going to an airport? Packing anger in your spiritual luggage is just as dangerous. It’s easily detected, sets off alarms, and puts people on the defensive.

Underneath our anger is a certain mistrust of God. Somewhere along the way we stopped believing that God is a God of love and of justice. If we truly believed that our lives, our hopes, and our dreams were in God’s hands, we wouldn’t be quite so shocked when imperfect people hurt us or let us down.

We can thrive in these desperate places! It is much too easy to think, “If only my life (or husband) was different, *then* I wouldn’t be so angry and I would finally find the joy I am looking for . . .” or “*then* I would be more productive,” or “*then* I would be a better



person.” And yet, it is on *this* journey that we find all of the things we are looking for and find God to be all of who He says He is.

I say this with great care, but our ultimate goal is not our happiness or even getting our way; our goal is the high calling of becoming more like Christ. Instead of fighting for a perfect life, we surrender to God that we might be perfected. Instead of being angry that life has scraped us, we allow the rough times to shape us into the image of Christ.

When we understand that it’s *this* journey that will deepen us, we will find a joy that trumps the world’s fleeting happiness, entitlements, and shallow selfishness, every time.



Though we may feel otherwise, anger is not our friend. Anger will betray us if we insist on coddling, nurturing, and protecting our right to it. And there will be countless reasons to get very angry over the course of our married lives. We will be overlooked, taken advantage of, and treated rudely. Our spouses are imperfect people. Unfortunately our spouses are married to women who need Jesus’ refining in our lives just as badly as they do.

What do we do, though, when the anger rises up within us? How do we keep an eternal perspective when the moment is pierced with pain? The Bible says, “In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent” (Psalm 4:4 NIV).

Let’s take a closer look at what this passage means for us:

How often when wounded by someone else’s sin, do *we* sin by our response to them? More than once I’ve told my boys that the Christian life is like a winding country road with deep ditches on each side. One side represents outright rebellion, the other *our*



response to someone else's rebellion. The Devil couldn't care less which ditch he gets us into; he just wants us off the road.

Is your husband rebelling against God and sinning by his selfishness? Don't allow your anger or self-righteousness over his sin to catapult you into the other ditch. Again, Satan doesn't care if you're in the ditch because of rebellion or a false sense of perfection; he just wants you off the road. These are moments of truth for us, and our choices are critical. When we are wronged, let's not allow our anger to betray us or forfeit what God has for us! May we always have the courage to let God deal with those who make us angry and dare to pray, "Search *me*, O God, and know *my heart*; test me and know *my anxious thoughts*. Point out anything in *me* that offends *you*, and lead *me* along the path of everlasting life" (Psalm 139:23–24).

In my book *Balance That Works When Life Doesn't*, I wrote about how heavy things can make us stronger. Later in this book, we will explore how certain heavy struggles can refine and strengthen us. But for now it is important to know and remember that anger is *not* a weight that will contribute to our growth. Traveling with anger as our companion will only serve to weaken us and diminish our ability to know and share God's love. "People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness" (Proverbs 14:29).

LENDING A HAND

Watch Your Step—Be careful not to think of yourself as a victim unless you truly are—in which case; don't wait; get the help you need! In every situation, God's love can reach you and will



provide a way for you. Refuse to allow anger to become an explosive force in your life. Do not dwell on your anger toward your husband—repent of it. As legitimate as your anger may be, it will betray and eventually destroy you. Ask God to take your anger from you. He will respond. In due time, He will intervene.

Get on the Right Path—Remember to think of yourself as an overcomer. Remember that God is a God of justice, and He will defend the humble heart. Remember to search your own heart. Remember that God is big enough to do something beautiful in your marriage.

Run From—Run from conversations that stir up your anger. Guard your speech and only talk about your situation with friends who walk in the humble fear of the Lord. Rehearsing and revisiting offenses only re-offends the soul and re-injures the relationship. Run from a complaining, grumbling attitude and embrace hopeful expectation instead.

Destination Ahead—Run toward the Word of God, toward times in His presence, and toward people who love you and call you to higher ground. Rather than go through the motions of being the good Christian wife while anger overtakes your inner life, get real with God. Give Him every detail of every emotion you are feeling. Stay connected with your church family. Keep your prayer life alive.

Watch the Fine Line—Guard your heart from anger, humble yourself before God, and be willing to forgive. BUT don't confuse this humble posture with being a doormat, someone who never expresses your thoughts and disappointments, and who misguidedly thinks it noble and martyrlike to let others walk all over you.



God's Promise for You Today—“In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. After you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation”
(1 Peter 5:10).

Precious Lord,

Help me to keep my heart pure. I long to walk in Your presence as I live here on earth (Psalm 116:9). You know what has broken my heart and You know what it will take to heal me. Heal me, Lord! And restore me! Fill me up with a heart of love and forgiveness for my husband. Help me to see him as You do. It doesn't matter if he is not seeing things clearly; You do, and that's what counts. I entrust myself into Your care, knowing You will come through for me in time. Keep anger from betraying me so I can be faithful to You and those I love. I need You every hour. Amen.

TO THINK ABOUT...

1. Read Ephesians 4:26–27

Allowing our anger to take hold of us (and our perspective) is not only a sin; it gives the Devil a mighty foothold. Describe a time when you regretfully allowed anger to poison your life.

What would you do differently today?

The Greek word for the term “foothold” in this passage is *topos*, which means opportunity, occasion, power, space, and place. When we give way to our anger, we give the Devil ample opportunity, power, and

A N G E R



occasion to ruin our lives. Does this make you look at anger differently? If so, explain. If not, explain.

2. Read Matthew 6:14–15

- a. How does this passage make you feel?
- b. Look out the window. Imagine if you had a cross planted in your yard and nailed to it was a list of offenses for your neighbors to see. When you look at the cross, do you see a list of your husband's misdeeds, or is your own list the first thing you see? Or do you walk in such a day-to-day fellowship with God that when you look at the empty cross you are simply thankful?
- c. Though most of us don't have a cross in our front yards, we do display the offenses committed against us and by us in the way we walk and talk and live. When we walk closely with the Lord, our lists are quickly reconciled with Christ's forgiveness and only the evidence of His love remains. Do you have a list that needs to be covered in the mercy of Christ? Do you need to forgive yourself and/or your husband? Write down what comes to mind. Take the time, do the work, get rid of your lists, and walk in forgiveness!

3. Read Ephesians 4:30–32

- a. Take a minute and write this passage out in a personalized prayer. Maybe this will help you get started: "Precious Father, May I never bring You sorrow by the way that I live because I belong to You. You've identified me as Your own. . . ."
- b. Now for something a little different—I call this a "listening prayer." Write a love letter to yourself from

ALONE IN MARRIAGE



Jesus; what do you suppose Jesus wants to say to you during this season? I will give you a running start: “My precious child, I love you so. I know what makes your heart break, but I want you to know . . .”*

4. Determine not to neglect your regular times of reading and prayer. When anger rises up, bow low and entrust yourself to God. Identify something in your life that has the potential to pull you away from your relationship to God and write it down. Pause for a moment and ask the Lord for wisdom in this matter. Write down what you sense He is telling you.

**This is a prayer exercise and what you write should not be taken as gospel (i.e., “God told me . . .”), or replace what you read in the Bible. The more acquainted you are with Scripture and the heart of the Father, the more biblically accurate your listening prayers will become. Even so, we only know in part; and yet God loves to reveal Himself to those who seek after Him.*