

Program: 09:24
For Broadcast: 14 June 2009

I CAN'T BELIEVE I DID IT

Pastor Richard Mau

“After Ms Foster cut off Ms Henson [in traffic], the two women played a cat and mouse game of tailgating, lane changing and slamming on the brakes until they got off at the same exit.

Ms Foster, the mother of three, was racing to pick up her four-year-old daughter at an after-school program for children with cerebral palsy. Ms Henson, a former Cub Scout Den Mother, was headed to her home in a quiet cul de sac.

When the two cars came to a stop at a traffic light at the exit ramp, Ms Foster jumped out and started toward Ms Henson’s vehicle. As Ms Foster approached, Ms Henson lowered the window about halfway, and reached for a .38 caliber revolver she kept in the console. She had permission to carry the weapon under Alabama’s Conceal-carry law. Ms Henson fired a single shot, striking Ms Foster in the left cheek. Ms Foster crumpled to the pavement and died.

As Ms Henson realized what she’d done, she said, “I can’t believe I shot her.”

This sad story was reported in the St Louis Post Dispatch in 1999.

Anger’s reality is evident! You only need to look at the news on TV to see that anger is a major issue in our society. A recent web search on anger identified 841,000 sites dealing with the subject, and one online bookseller lists 860 titles on anger. What about you? When was the last time you felt angry?

Poorly managed anger is the root of many serious physical, social and emotional problems including poor physical health, chronic disease, depression, unhappy relationships, violence and crime. By contrast, the benefits of managing anger in constructive ways are: -

- Lower heart rate and blood pressure
- Better sleep
- Better digestion
- Better relationships
- Improved problem-solving ability
- More constructive communication
- Increased self-discipline and self- confidence

Some people are taught that it’s wrong to get angry. Others are taught it’s their right to get angry! The truth is that everybody gets angry. Anger is a natural feeling that shows you something is wrong and can stir you to action against that which hurts you or others.

In our world we see much that isn’t right- homelessness, hunger, war, verbal or physical abuse. These are situations of unfairness and injustice about which we should be angry. Many times, though, anger isn’t so clearly justified. It may arise out of a threat to your security, identity, or control, any time people aren’t doing what you need or want them to do.

Your anger is a gift that shows you something is out of order.

Common causes of anger include:

- Frustration
- Mistreatment
- Injustice
- Constant noise
- Hurt pride or embarrassment

- Disappointment
- Betrayal
- Loss and grief
- Need to be right
- Stress
- Impatience
- Conflict with your values...and
- Fatigue.

Learning to express your anger in appropriate, non-destructive ways is challenging because it requires you to accept your anger, learn to understand yourself better and to learn to resolve conflict. Think back to when you've been angry recently. What does the anger tell you about yourself, what you value, and what is going on in your life?

Consider Serena, who is already running late to the office and gets stuck in a slow lane of traffic. She's stressed, frustrated, and angry because she's not in control. She recklessly pulls into the next lane, cutting off another car and yelling, "Get off the road! Who taught you how to drive? Idiot."

Well, what's going on here? Firstly, Serena was angry because the other drivers did not respect her need to go faster. Secondly, she responded by fighting back- cutting other people off, yelling at them. Thirdly, the result is that when Serena got to the office a few minutes late, she was angry and tense. What she wanted was to get there on time and be ready to get to work. Next time she's in this situation, she could:

- Stay relaxed and use the time to think about what she'll do when she gets to the office and arrive feeling relaxed and ready to work.
- She might also learn to leave a little earlier so she doesn't feel anxious about getting to work on time.
- And perhaps find another less busy route to the office.

The Bible offers some practical guidelines for how to express anger:

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1)

"In your anger, do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not let the Devil get a foothold." (Ephesians 4:26-27)

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Acknowledge that you aren't perfect. Everyone makes mistakes- sometimes you might get mad at yourself because you did something that disappoints you. When this happens, forgive yourself and move on. When someone else makes you angry, forgive them also.

We also do things that disappoint God- making other things in life more important than God, doing things that hurt us or other people. The Bible calls all these things "sin" and sin keeps you apart from God. But God's Son, Jesus Christ, gave His life to pay for all of our sins and because of that God forgives us.

A first- century writer named Paul knew about selfishness and kept trying to overcome it, but he was continually frustrated.

"I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out," he wrote. *"For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do- this I keep doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."*

(Romans 7: 18-20)

Paul recognized that there was a point at which no matter how much he wanted to do the right thing, he wasn't successful. Ultimately, there was something wrong inside that got the better of him. He was at his limit and could not be the good person he wanted to be.

Can you identify with Paul? Does anger get the better of you sometimes? Do your best attempts at self-control fall short? Do you lack a sense of peace and rightness in your relationships with others? Are you unable to forgive? Do you feel distant from God? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, God invites you to come as you are, with all your frustration and failure. He loves you just as you are! This is how much God loves you:

"He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have Eternal Life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." (John 3: 16-17)

As you continue to learn to manage your anger in a healthy, productive way, God is with you. Whenever you feel weary from the effort self-control requires, or frustrated by failing to express anger the way you plan to, remember this invitation from Jesus:

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

(Matthew 11:28)