

A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



Chapter 11:

Wild emotions - the gift of anger

Based on Judges chapters 13 to 16; John 2:13-17

This month's content is written by Captains Vanessa and Xander Coleman, church planters based in Buckingham.

INSPIRE

Our 'Into the Wild' journey brings us this month to one of the Bible's most challenging characters. Samson's story is a wild one, uncomfortable to read and hard to get our heads around. His is a story full of anger and violence (as well as a generous amount of impropriety), and he's probably not an example we would advocate following. If 'wild' looks like Samson, then maybe we'd rather not go there.

But Samson's wildness was all part of a greater work God was doing. God doesn't need to restrict himself to tidy emotions and polished people. God works through all sorts - even our anger.

So what is anger and how can it affect our prayer lives? How can we respond healthily to it and how might God just use it to change the world?

Read alone or with a friend, reflect on the discussion questions over the phone with someone or in an online small group / Bible study, try the prayer activities ... and see what happens when you get wild with anger!

If you'd like to receive regular updates throughout the 'Into the Wild' journey over the coming year, including invitations to our regular Zoom prayer gatherings, [sign up here](#).



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EXPLORE

Introduction

Anger is a wild emotion. It can scare us because we don't know what it will lead us to do. It can frighten us because we've been harmed by someone else's anger. We may even take the view that Christians should not get angry at all.

Anger is an important emotion because it signals to us that something is wrong. Like pain, it's part of our alert system. Anger is also a gift from God, and if we read the Scriptures honestly, we have to conclude that it *can* be a holy emotion - and one that God feels.

'My cry came before him, into his ears. The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because he [God] was angry.' (Psalm 18:6-7)

'[Jesus] looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts ...' (Mark 3:5)

The Bible has plenty of warnings about how anger can become a problem:

'Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.' (James 1:20)

Perhaps because of this, I (Vanessa) am naturally conflict averse. But I have learned that peacemaking often means starting (or, perhaps more accurately, exposing) conflict. Conflict to disrupt the status quo, to restore justice or to right a relationship. It is often more dangerous to ignore conflict than to face it head on and move into peace.

Context

Samson lived at a time when Israel was under the oppression of the Philistines. There was a tense kind of truce in place, and it seems God raised up Samson to disturb that 'peace' with his reckless, wild behaviour, to bring things to a boiling point, and ultimately to bring about freedom for God's people.

Samson's mighty anger against the enemy is evidence of the Spirit of God working in him. Samson prays:

'Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines ...' (Judges 16:28)



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That feels shocking to read. How often do we feel anger, but then squash it down, ignore it or distract ourselves from it because it feels unholy? Undoubtedly sometimes it is. We imagine good Christians (especially prayerful ones) must be calm and loving, gentle and mild.

Deepen

But what if the anger in your heart is a gift from the Lord to care passionately about wrongs that need righting? What if you were to pay attention to what anger communicates in your life? Have boundaries been crossed that need to be upheld? Have people been taken advantage of that need protecting? Are there situations of injustice that need exposing and rectifying?

I came to realise recently that I had allowed myself to fall asleep to some anger in my own heart for several years. It wasn't anger towards a person, but anger at God about what a certain situation had stolen from me and from the people I love. I had done my best just to carry on and manage life, to make things work as best as I could.

I had not taken my anger to God and really let it all out to him. Instead, I'd squashed it all down, secretly scared at the wildness of this emotion and frightened of opening the jar in case I couldn't get the lid back on. My anger became a blockage I couldn't get past - an elephant in the prayer closet - and so for three years I had not really been able to pray at all.

It was when Samson was asleep that Delilah cut off his hair and he lost that God-given power to fight oppression (Judges 16:19-20).

In our effort to not sin in our anger (Ephesians 4:26), might we risk falling asleep to the injustices and wrongs that have caused that anger to rise up in us in the first place? Maybe it just gets too exhausting to carry the weight of that emotion, so we avoid the difficult conversation, change the subject or ignore the gnawing feeling that things are not as they should be - and so nothing changes.

Samson's undoing was his falling asleep to the power of God manifested through his anger.

Righteous anger

Jesus presents us with a perfect counterpoint to the story of Samson's failure.

'In the temple courts he [Jesus] found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said,



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“Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” (John 2:14-16)

I (Xander) am struck by the way Jesus chooses to act on his anger rather than falling asleep to it. Verse 15 captures my attention: ‘He made a whip out of chords.’ I don’t know how to make a whip, but I guess it would take a few minutes, long enough for the red mist to clear a bit and for some of the adrenaline to leave the system.

So this is not an uncontrolled outburst of unbridled rage. Jesus is not overcome by his anger. This is a premeditated response to an injustice. Jesus is stirring up his zeal on behalf of the holiness of God’s Temple and is choosing this course of action on purpose.

Conclusion

Anger is a wild emotion and we are called to steward our anger as Jesus did - avoiding sin but letting it stir us to engage with the power of God to challenge the status quo.

A truth to hold on to

Anger is one of God’s gifts to us.

Challenge

- Next time you are angry, stop and sit down with God to work out why.

WATCH

Anger is a complex subject, and this month's Into the Wild videos explore it from two different angles. Meshiel Brown talks about being on the receiving end of other people's anger, and of learning how to deal with her own anger in a healthy way. Marjorie Parrott talks about anger and its place in stirring us to action against injustice ... particularly racism.

[Watch this video here](#)



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DISCUSS

- Christians often feel they are not allowed to be angry, especially with God. How can we be awake to our anger within ourselves and before God?
- How do we stand with those who are angry, rather than trying to solve or minimise the situation?
- What are you angry about? Have you talked to God about it? Is God inviting you to do anything about it?
- Is there a situation where you have settled into a status quo to avoid conflict - but you know it isn't fullness of life?
- Have you been hurt by someone else's anger? What were they angry about and why do you think their anger ended up causing you pain?
- Churches are full of human beings, which means they are also full of angry people. How can we help each other express our anger safely?

PRAY

1. Three things

Name out loud before God three things that make you angry. They could be big or little things. Ask God to show you what these feelings of anger are signalling to you. Anger always tells us something about ourselves, something about the world around us and something about how we feel about God. Invite the Holy Spirit to show you what your anger is telling you.

2. Getting physical

Try getting physical with your prayers. Activating our bodies in prayer can help us to engage in more primal emotions like anger. While praying, you could try pacing, stomping, shouting (Commissioner Samuel Logan Brengle has a whole chapter on shouting in *Helps to Holiness*), or you might even find something you can break (safely), as an expression of the breakthrough you long to see.

3. Be part of the answer

Anger at injustices in particular can be a great springboard for intercessory prayer. But sometimes God also invites us to 'do something' to help our prayers. Could you write to your MP or the board of a company? Could intercession look like scrubbing off that graffiti or picking up the rubbish?



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4. Practise with God

If you know you need to initiate conflict or challenge a problem situation but are feeling apprehensive about having that difficult conversation, you could try practising it with God. Tell him all the things you would like to say to the other person, then stop and listen to him. Let him help you shape your thoughts and your words so that you can express yourself more clearly and more fully. You will also find that you grow in courage as you talk it through with God. Then that difficult conversation might just bring about a huge change.

WEBSITE AND CONTACT EMAIL

For resources and sign up: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/resources/into-the-wild

Email Prayer Network: sprayernetwork@salvationarmy.org.uk



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