

WAVERLEY ABBEY INSIGHT SERIES



INSIGHT INTO

**ANGER**

Chris Ledger and Wendy Bray

**CWR**

## **WAVERLEY ABBEY INSIGHT SERIES**

The Waverley Abbey Insight Series has been developed in response to the great need to help people understand and face some key issues that many of us struggle with today. CWR's ministry spans teaching, training and publishing, and this series draws on all of these areas of ministry.

Sourced from material first presented over Insight Days by CWR at their base, Waverley Abbey House, presenters and authors have worked in close co-operation to bring this series together, offering clear insight, teaching and help on a broad range of subjects and issues. Bringing biblical understanding and godly insight, these books are written both for those who help others and those who face these issues themselves.

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## FOREWORD

Anger, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is 'extreme or passionate displeasure'. This definition will hardly do as an explanation of the rich and contradictory emotions that make up this confusing and puzzling word. We have all known anger. I have, and you have. None of us has excuses to offer, but there have been times when we have felt that the anger we expressed was not wholly wrong, was not always bad and indeed, may have actually done some good. On the other hand, we can all think of those painful moments in a stressful situation when, instead of biting our tongue or submitting with grace, we have retaliated with violent words or, even worse, violence itself.

The fact is that there are so many questions about anger. When does peevishness, bad temper, irritability and plain grumpiness end, and anger begin? What about the link between anger and violence? We all know the story of Jesus who, in His righteous anger, made a 'whip of cords' and drove the shopkeepers out of the Temple. We are not told if He hurt anybody but what is described is a violent act. This may well approximate to what Shakespeare calls 'noble anger' in *King Lear*. But noble anger, protest and displeasure will not do for King Lear. His anger directed towards his daughters, because of their treatment of him, boiled over into revenge. He wanted blood. Little wonder that *King Lear* is one of Shakespeare's darkest Tragedies as he explores human weakness. That story is far from unusual. We have only to think of road rage as car drivers wave their fists in fury or mouth obscenities at other road users, to note the presence of anger in modern life. When it spills over into violence, as it does more frequently than

## INSIGHT INTO ANGER

we would like to admit, we can acknowledge the power of anger in daily life.

In this excellent exploration of anger from a Christian point of view, Chris Ledger and Wendy Bray dig deep into the psychology of anger and what it does to us if we allow it to dominate our emotional lives. They handle it in a balanced and mature way, showing that anger can be a normal, healthy, human emotion, but when it controls us, rather than we controlling it, it has the potential to become a destructive, malevolent force that may destroy personal relationships and affect adversely the quality of our lives. What is particularly attractive about this examination of anger is not only the incisive pastoral suggestions about how we may master it, but also how we may redirect its energy into positive service for ourselves and others.

From time immemorial anger has been one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Chris Ledger and Wendy Bray show how the love of God found in Christ is more than able to conquer its power.

George Carey. 103<sup>rd</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury  
(On his retirement in 2002 George Carey was made a life-peer, as Lord Carey of Clifton)

## INTRODUCTION

Mention the word 'anger' to a randomly selected group of ordinary men, women and children and each one will respond differently.

Some will immediately recall a recent outburst of anger which has been directed towards them and from which they are still reeling; others will be aware of their own underlying angry feelings. As discussion progresses each may choose to illustrate their anger in different ways: a clenched fist, a raging bull, a balloon about to burst, a simmering pot.

Our personal view of anger and its place in our lives is unique. It will be dependent on our personality, our life experience and our ability to handle the angry emotions we experience in ourselves and in others.

However we perceive anger – and some of us live in fear of it – it's important to recognise that anger is just one little letter – 'd' – away from 'danger'; consequently we need to be aware of its risks. Those who live with the persistent anger of a partner or family member, boss or neighbour will recognise the risk of living in a place where anger makes mouths – and sadly, sometimes fists – work faster than minds.

This practical book aims to help us understand anger, its roots, causes and development. It offers a biblical perspective on anger, explores how God models anger, and considers how we might express our anger to Him in a healthy way.

It also introduces strategies for dealing with both our own anger and the anger of other people: strategies which, with practice and commitment, can be incorporated into the bank of life and communications skills we draw upon each day. For some

of us, those strategies will be life-changing; for a few they may even be life-saving.

Wendy Bray

#### NOTE FROM CHRISTINE LEDGER

Are you an angry person? No, I would reply . . . after all I don't often lose my temper. Well, that would have been my reply until I undertook counselling training! Then I came to realise that all my teenage moodiness, and all the times I have given others 'the silent treatment' was an expression of anger. Anger is a sign that something is wrong, or out of balance in our life, or in the world. This emotion can take many forms and expressions – from the destructive to the constructive. It is wrong when we let anger boil over and allow it to damage others, or we hold onto it so long that it turns into bitterness. However, anger can be used constructively when we harness it to provide energy and courage to change situations . . . we see Jesus doing this.

The contents of this book are from a CWR Insight Day I had the privilege to present. It is for those who experience anger, and for others who help and counsel people struggling with destructive anger. Hopefully the material will give a clear insight into and understanding of this emotion, together with skills to handle anger more constructively. Again Wendy has done a brilliant job in taking my notes from the Insight Day and adding her own unique contribution to create a book which I hope you will find very useful.



## CHAPTER 1

# WHAT IS ANGER?

### INTRODUCTION

Anger is often viewed as a negative emotion – especially by Christians.

It is seen as an emotion to be tamed, battled with – even denied. We are embarrassed by anger, shamed by it, and may do all we can to cover it up or banish it with excuses. In doing so, we are mistaking its purpose and function: for anger is a complex God-given gift that we should not ignore.

### WHAT IS ANGER *FOR*?

Anger has many sources – and we'll discuss those later – but it also has many functions. Those of us who have always believed that all anger is wrong may be surprised at the positive nature of those functions: not the things that anger rises up against, but what it is *for*.

Understanding what anger is for may help us to realise that it is not always a negative emotion, but part of a normal, healthy, emotional make-up – usually for a very good reason.

### Anger

- draws our attention to hurts and wounds;
- helps us identify fear so that we can protect ourselves if necessary;
- energises us to put wrongs right.

Anger locates hurt by giving a voice to the pain of unmet needs, to a sense of rejection, perhaps, or to emotional or physical hurt that we may have left unvoiced – often for years.

Sometimes we may not even be aware of our hurt until a single incident or word triggers an angry response. Then our anger reveals what we may have been unknowingly hiding: that, for example, we do *very much* mind if our boss takes us for granted, we are left out of a guest list once more or we are expected to put up with unreasonable demands or behaviour from a relative without complaint.

Anger may also seek to protect. When our lives are under threat, an angry response is often the first response, in partnership with fear. If faced with a mugger, most of us would follow our instantaneous shock and surprise with an innate sense of outrage which says, ‘I will not let this happen’. We might become angry and perhaps lash out, fighting to protect ourselves.

A parent’s anger at their child’s recklessness or risk-taking is similar. Many a relieved parent of a teenager has burnt up the joy and relief they have felt at their son or daughter’s safe arrival home with explosive fury at the risk they have entertained: ‘Where *have*