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THE CRY BEHIND THE ANGER

THROUGH THE YEARS, as I have counseled with hundreds of people trying to make sense of their anger, I have learned one thing. There is always something more that feeds the anger than what is observed on the surface. Angry people may appear strong, willful, or certain, but be assured that beneath the veneer are fear and loneliness and insecurity and pain. Especially, there is pain. Whether they admit it or not, angry people are hurt people, and they have somehow come to believe that they can resolve their own pain by inflicting pain upon others. Their reasoning is usually subconscious; nonetheless, each time anger is misapplied, it is a reflection of a deep wound that longs to be healed.

As I work with individuals trying to overcome anger's harmful effects, I recognize that they will remain trapped inside their own anger if they do not learn to peer deeply inside their souls to explore the factors that give impetus to their anger. Yes, they will need to learn techniques, if you will, that would represent an improved means of addressing frustration, and they can certainly be expected to learn the difference between healthy and unhealthy forms of anger. They need to recognize, though, that a mere attempt to adjust anger's manifestation without also digging into the matters generating the pain produce superficial change at best.

To be released from the trap of anger, these persons need to identify the cry behind the rage.

Exasperation was written all over Julie's face as she sat in my office with her husband, Steve. "We've been married six years," she explained, "and during that time I've hardly known a moment of peace. When we dated, Steve had been a perfect gentleman. In fact, he was so nice to me and my kids that it almost seemed too good to be true. Well, in the first month of marriage I learned that it *was* too good to be true. This guy has a temper like no one I know." Julie's face turned red and tears watered her eyes as she tried to keep her composure.

"In our first few months of marriage, I learned that he had dozens of do's and don'ts regarding the ways life should unfold. He had rules for everything, and if I or one of my kids broke a rule, the floodgates of anger would burst wide open." Julie went on to explain that Steve could curse easily at her, calling her foul names and making wild accusations. Sometimes he would slam doors, throw things, or punch his fist into a wall. When driving his truck, he would tailgate motorists who drove too slowly and he often made nasty remarks, even though it would do absolutely nothing to move the traffic along more smoothly. Steve had never been fired from his job as a plumbing contractor, but that was because he owned the company. Through the years, he had worn out one employee after another because he could be so moody and belligerent. Anger seemed to be the defining feature of his personality.

When I asked Steve what he thought about the things being related by Julie, he grinned and shrugged, "What can I say? She's right, I've got a temper. But hey, don't most people? It's not like I beat her or anything like that. Yeah, I could probably stand to lighten up a little, but it's not like I'm some sort of criminal."

With that response, Julie heaved a great sigh. "He's impossible, and I don't know if he'll ever get it! His anger is draining me, and I'm not able to handle it much longer. If he's not careful, he's going to get his third divorce because I'm not going to keep putting up with it, just like his first two wives wouldn't."

In my counseling office, I encounter people like Steve who seem to retreat toward anger like an old friend who is not really good for them but is familiar. Despite many damaging experiences, they keep going back to the familiar anger patterns because they know no other way to respond when their world becomes problematic. Family members and friends may plead with them to change tactics, but to no avail. Even after apologies are offered and promises for improvement are made, the ugly forms of anger predictably return. As illogical as it may be, it can seem to outside observers that chronically angry people have a strong commitment to keeping distasteful emotions alive. Certainly they have not made a commitment toward better alternatives.

People like Steve, who have such a ready response of anger, seem to be held captive by their emotional impulses. Though they may openly admit that their anger produces very few positive results, they remain stuck in a nonproductive cycle as if drawn to it like a magnet. This nonproductive anger becomes a trap that keeps them caged inside a life of misery.

Let's acknowledge that no one is entirely free from anger. Whether we want it to be part of our life experience or not, it is natural to each per-

sonality. Sometimes we have little control over the possibility of anger being experienced; it can appear quite unannounced. At times it can be triggered by an immediate hurt or frustration, while at other times it is provoked by a memory of past experience. When I counsel angry people, it is not the experience of anger that concerns me; rather, I focus most powerfully on what they do with the emotion and why it can so easily be used nonproductively.

As I continued to speak with Steve about his anger, I learned that this problem had plagued him most of his life. Steve's own father had also lived inside an anger trap. Easily agitated, the father was known for violent outbursts that would seemingly arise from nowhere. "I remember as a grade school boy," Steve recalled, "when my brother and I were bickering in the back seat of the family's station wagon as we were traveling on vacation. Without a word of warning, my dad pulled the car over to the shoulder of the road, then he came around to my door. He opened it with a jerk, yanked me out of the car, then he blistered my bottom *hard*. My little brother started crying and my mother yelled at my dad for being so abrasive, but none of that fazed him. He pushed me back into the car, and still without saying a word, we drove on. That's the kind of guy he was. He was mean and cold. I couldn't begin to count the number of times he took out his anger like that toward either me or my brother."

I probed, "How did that harsh treatment affect you?"

Still trying to act nonchalant, Steve shrugged and said, "I hated it, but I also got used to it. It got to the point where it didn't bother me anymore."

I did not buy that last statement for a second. Receiving such ill treatment *did* bother Steve, and it played a great role in the development of his own adult anger. Throughout his teen years, then through his twenties, thirties, and now his forties, Steve's anger played out in an almost nonstop fashion. That anger did not arise from a vacuum. It had very deep roots that were tied to the pain he never resolved as a boy who lived in fear of his father's next outburst. For him to make improvements in his current management of emotions, he would need to open his mind to great insight and adjustment. Despite his statements to the contrary, I recognized that Steve was a deeply wounded man, and the potency of his current anger was a clear signal that he was not remotely coming to terms with his pain.

The Purpose of Anger

When I hear stories from angry people and those who live with angry people, I learn that the triggering experiences for anger vary widely. Anger may arise, for instance, if a family member speaks in a wrong tone of voice.

It is displayed when a coworker does not produce desired results. Anger is experienced when traffic is unfriendly, when others are argumentative, when bills pile up, when the dog relieves himself indoors, when someone fails to do as promised, when another person is critical, when a child refuses to mind, when one is feeling ignored.

In most of the instances that trigger anger, the emotion is likely to be managed distastefully, usually in insulting, invalidating, or insensitive behavior. That being the case, many will conclude that anger has no positive function. It seems to be the response of a person who is mean-spirited or who has low regard toward those provoking the response.

Anger, though, is not a one-dimensional emotion, and we need not summarily dismiss it as all bad. Although it can certainly be used in an unhealthy or unstable manner, it is not always wrong to feel angry. At the heart of anger is a cry for respect. Though angry persons may not speak these exact words, their emotion may reveal thoughts such as:

> "You need to understand that I matter."
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> "I want to be held in high regard."
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> "I'm tired of feeling as though life is going to be one extended struggle."
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> "I deserve better treatment than what I am currently receiving."
>
> "I'm not going to let you get away with ill treatment toward me."
>
> "My opinions are as good as anyone else's. Pay attention to me!"
>
> "Don't look down on me. That's offensive."

When people feel angry, it is a response to a perceived threat or invalidation. The anger taps into a primary desire for self-preservation. In fact, anger can be defined as the emotion of self-preservation. Specifically, angry people wish to preserve personal worth, perceived needs, and heartfelt convictions. Angry people want to feel that they have significance, and they are distressed as they assume that others will not or cannot address them in a way that reinforces personal significance.

Angry people, however, tend to do themselves no favors because the legitimate message of self-preservation can be communicated so distastefully that the receiver of the message hears nothing good. For instance, Steve described to me how his anger could be triggered by Julie's occasional forgetfulness. She might tell him that she would pick up his shirts at the dry cleaner's, but at the end of the day when he asks about the shirts, he will hear, "Oops, I forgot to get them." Likewise, he might ask her to purchase a specific item when she goes grocery shopping, and she could easily pick

up a number of items—with the lone exception of the one he had requested. Steve explained to me, "She's been forgetful so many times in our marriage that I can no longer tolerate it. When is it going to occur to her that she needs to be a person whose word can be trusted?"

Was Steve wrong to feel angry? Not necessarily. In fact, it would be reasonable for him to speak openly with Julie about her forgetfulness. Instead of addressing his convictions constructively, though, Steve's communication style resembled a rocket launch. "What's the deal with you?" he would shout. "Why can't you help me with one measly request?" Of course, Julie never received such indignation well, meaning the legitimate portion of his message would be completely lost.

People like Steve can learn to address anger constructively. For instance, requests can be made for appropriate treatment without the request turning into an opportunity to belittle or intimidate. Boundaries and stipulations can be established even as the offending person is treated with dignity. The experience of anger not only does not have to become a springboard for foul treatment, it can actually prompt someone to stand up for needs and convictions in a positive manner.

Those who are caught in the anger trap, however, have not learned to approach anger constructively. Shackled by insecurity, fragile egotism, shame, or distrust, their anger is so raw that it can be displayed in circumstances that may not really warrant anger, and it is commonly displayed in a manner that completely sabotages any possibility for relationship growth or healing.

The Deeper Issue

When people like Steve attempt to make sense of their anger, it is tempting to focus merely on the immediate event that triggers the emotion. For instance, Steve might blame his anger on Julie by saying, "If you had been more responsible, I wouldn't be feeling so tense." Or perhaps he might say, "How else am I supposed to respond when one of the kids talks to me in that smart-aleck tone of voice?" He would not be entirely wrong to link the anger to the immediate circumstance, but in doing so, he could easily ignore the deeper issue.

Angry people are hurting, fragile people. In most cases, they are carrying shame that has gone unresolved for years, perhaps decades. Though the anger may seemingly be a reaction, for instance, to someone's current lack of cooperation, it is also a response that can be traced to pain and rejection in key relationships from years gone by. Though most angry people do not put it in these words, they have concluded that the world is a

hostile, often unfriendly place where people cannot fully be trusted. This perception is most commonly formed in the childhood years and expanded during the adult years.

For years, I have met with hundreds of people who attend my anger workshops. As we explore the reasons for the buildup of anger and the options for managing it, I attempt to put their habits into a broad perspective. "How many of you," I ask, "grew up with at least one parent who had problems with anger?" Close to 100 percent of the workshop participants raise their hands. At that point, I emphasize how their current anger is a continuation of the hurt they experienced early in life due to exposure to messages of criticism, condescension, or invalidation. The anger that seemingly is a response to a current frustration is actually being fed by a root system that is drawing upon memories of rejection.

No one was born to become bitterly angry. Our Creator gave each of us life for the purpose of becoming both a recipient and a giver of love. Anger arises from the painful discovery that love is remiss, that judgment, rejection, or abandonment seems more sure. As experiences of antilove mount, the spirit becomes pessimistic, resulting in a sort of free-floating anger that represents a yearning to return to the love that was originally intended by the Creator. In this sense, anger would be considered good, if we could but respond to its promptings constructively. Many, however, use their anger to respond to rejection with rejection, to enmity with enmity, to hatred with hatred. When this occurs often enough, the commitment to goodness is supplanted by persistently dark moods that eventually hold the spirit captive.

If you have had a history of disappointment or relationship friction, you may subconsciously look for "evidence" that perpetuates your pessimistic belief about life. For instance, Steve could recall one episode after another from his childhood when his father would speak belligerently to him. His dad had a quick temper, and the slightest deviation from his preferences could bring a loud and sharp rebuke. If Steve displayed a weary or sluggish spirit while the family ate around the supper table, his father would apparently interpret it as a slight against him, so he might angrily spout, "What's the matter with you? Are you so high and mighty that you can't say anything to the rest of us?" If Steve bickered with his older sister, his dad might shout, "You're so worthless, the only thing you can do good is to make trouble!" Naturally, these words would sting, and Steve stored up feelings of resentment. He repeatedly wished he could have a father who was patient and understanding and supportive.

Now in his forties, Steve no longer had to worry about daily disruptions with his father, but he might occasionally hear words from Julie that

reminded him of earlier messages of rejection. Once Julie mentioned that she wished he would be clearer in coordinating his schedule with her so she could be more synchronized with him. She spoke in an even tone of voice, and her request was legitimate. Steve, however, exploded: "Why are you always trying to pin me down? I don't need you to be my nursemaid, telling me when I have to report in to you!" Julie was baffled and shaken because his anger seemed so disproportionate to her request.

What was going on? Steve had assumed a hostile stance toward Julie. Assuming that she was attempting to control or stifle him, he quickly convinced himself that he would *not* allow Julie or anyone else to tell him what to do. Though unaware of it at the moment, he was emotionally drawing upon the hundreds of times his father belittled him and told him how to order his life to suit his own preferences. Using generalized thinking, he assumed that Julie was operating with a similarly hostile agenda. His anger revealed that he could not trust Julie because he had never learned to trust his raging father.

As you try to make sense of your current anger, be willing to examine the emotion within a deep and broad perspective. You inevitably want to preserve your personal dignity as you feel that your world is treating you unfairly, and that can be good. Would you be willing to question why your anger can be too strong or perhaps displaced onto a person who has not merited a sharp rebuke?

Long-Standing Misassumptions

To more fully tap into the origins of your anger, be willing to consider some key misassumptions that tend to accompany anger that is too overpowering or intense.

Misassumption Number One: Conflict Is an Ongoing Reminder That Differences Mean Trouble for the Relationship

When Steve was a boy, he learned that when he had differences with his father, he could expect trouble to follow. If his dad had been more mature or stable, he could have taught Steve that differences are not always wrong or bad, and that they could often become an impetus for personal expansion or growth. In his immaturity, however, the father would treat differences as something to be squelched. To add intensity to this problem, Steve also experienced several key adult relationships (including his two failed marriages) that were defined by poor negotiation of differences. He learned that differentness within those relationships would be accompanied by an

attempt to force conformity. Likewise, differentness would draw out a response of defensiveness or invalidation.

Angry people often have such a strong belief that differentness produces pain that they assume a self-preserving stance almost immediately when faced with conflict. The data held inside their "emotional memory chips" alert them to take cover by using any means possible. For instance, angry people might receive another person's expression of differentness with an immediate statement of defensiveness. Perhaps they respond with words of defiance. Sometimes they feel the need to retreat, for the purpose of avoiding the pain that is presumed to be coming.

As an example, Julie approached Steve one Saturday morning to discuss a change in her day's schedule. "We've got a problem regarding our plans to go shopping for the garden supplies," she told him. "Ashley neglected to tell me that she's got to meet some classmates at the library so they could finish a science project. I'm going to have to take care of that before you and I can run our errands."

Steve responded in an irksome tone of voice: "Why is it so predictable that you'll put me on hold when some other matter interferes with our plans? Are you just going to let those kids grow up believing that their priorities will always take precedence over our marriage?"

Julie was stunned. She felt frustrated that her daughter had waited until the last minute to reveal her needs, but she assumed that she could explain her needs clearly to Steve and he would be able to adjust. He had no other pressing matters on his day's schedule. Instead of this simple conflict being handled calmly, though, Steve instinctively assumed that this problem meant trouble. He interpreted Julie's decision to help Ashley as a repudiation of him. He also assumed that the change in schedule would ruin his day.

Why such pessimism? Why was Steve so unwilling to take this minor conflict in stride with the belief that he and Julie could easily find a compromise solution? In his past, Steve learned that when he and a parent or a sibling or a former spouse were at odds regarding schedules, he would be left out. If he tried to negotiate for the purpose of having his needs met, he usually felt rebuffed or misunderstood. A simple request often turned into an ugly tiff that left him feeling that his needs were unmerited, and by the time the conflict ran its course he would be punished, ignored, or scorned.

Misassumption Number Two: Conflict Is a Sure Indication of Rejection

Angry people are pessimists who live with a chronic fear of being deemed unworthy. Many angry people would deny that they suffer from deep inse-

curity; nonetheless, the ease with which tension rises indicates otherwise. Unable to process conflict with objective criteria, these people immediately assume that problems are directly linked to nonaccepting attitudes of others.

One evening, fourteen-year-old Ashley was clearly in a foul mood. Steve requested that she clean the kitchen, but instead of cooperating Ashley rolled her eyes and huffed as she grumbled about being used as slave labor. About that time, Julie stepped into the picture and immediately sensed trouble, asking "Is there a problem here?" Steve replied to her with an edgy voice, "I'll say there's a problem. Ashley doesn't respect a word I say, and she's got to make a federal case of it every time I ask her to do something." Julie had also had a run-in that day with Ashley, so she responded, "I guess she's in one of her moods again, so we're going to have to be patient."

With that simple response from Julie, Steve swelled up. "Why is it that you can't back me up when Ashley's treating me like dirt?" Julie was once again baffled. Did Steve interpret her simple remark as an invalidation? Later, as she reflected on Steve's tension, she reminded herself that he often turned conflict into a referendum regarding his worth. To her, Steve seemed to be a thin-skinned person who would interpret comments to mean that you were either for him or against him.

Steve's family background instilled a question mark in his mind regarding his inherent worth. His dad was not without positive traits, as evidenced by the fact that he tried to maintain a presence in Steve's life by coaching his baseball teams and teaching him how to work on car engines. Steve recalled, though, that there was a strong emphasis on doing the right thing, and whenever he fell short his father would readily voice displeasure. His mother was not as forceful in her interactions with Steve, but she too had been known to make comments that caused Steve to question his value. "I don't know what I'm going to do with you," she would often complain. "I just wish you could be more cooperative, like your sister."

As an adult looking back on his developmental years, Steve would never say that his parents hated him. He would, however, recall that he felt his acceptance in their sight was tenuous. He knew that if he heard positive words of commendation from them, it would not be long before he would hear sentiments that seemed to imply disfavor. Because his parents did not openly discuss their belief in his inherent value, Steve's feelings of worth came to resemble a yo-yo, up one moment and down the next.

As children develop, adults hold great sway over their impressionable minds. Their words and attitudes have great authority, which means children build their self-concept around adult pronouncements. Children look to their authority figures to answer the question, "Do I matter?" Sometimes parents present a message of affirmation clearly so that even when conflict arises, the child learns to respond with confidence. "I'm valued,"

the child will learn to reason, "because I'm in the presence of an adult who consistently holds me in high regard."

Angry adults, however, may not be able to recall consistent feelings of safety and security when they were in the presence of an authority figure. I am not suggesting that all angry adults were chronically exposed to harsh abuse and condescension in their early years (though many were). I am suggesting, though, that the message of unconditional love was not fully addressed, leaving a question mark in developing children's minds. Not knowing for certain if their worth was constant, these individuals learned to respond to conflict with an attitude of uncertainty.

Misassumption Number Three: It Is Impossible to Address Self-Preserving Needs with Others Constructively

When I counsel angry adults, I want them to learn that they can stand up for their legitimate needs and convictions in a way that can clear a path for love and cooperation. Often, as I explain how anger does not need to be accompanied by harsh or abrupt methods, I receive words of protest. "You just don't understand what I'm up against," I may hear. "When I become angry with people who give me fits, there is no way that I'll be taken seriously if I just communicate in a soft, friendly tone of voice. I live with stubborn people, and the only way I'm going to be heard is to be strong."

Angry people are often surprised when I explain that calmness and strength are not mutually exclusive traits. In fact, I go on to explain that harsh, forceful communication is not a display of strength, but weakness. Stubborn, abrasive forms of anger are accompanied by an implied message that says, "I'm fearful that you won't respect what I have to say, so I've got to use a power tactic to get your attention." As a contrast, if anger is accompanied by calm confidence, another message is given: "I believe in what I'm saying, and I invite you to believe in me too."

It would certainly be nice if you could count on others to have a cooperative spirit each time you communicate anger with calm confidence. Unfortunately, this is not always going to happen, given the fact that others may not respond to your anger maturely. Despite their lack of proper communication response, you can still choose to manage anger appropriately.

Once Steve spoke with me about a dispute he had with his brother. Because their early years were filled with tension and arguing, they developed a habit as adults of being defensive whenever they needed to discuss differences. On this occasion, they were trying to coordinate plans to get their families together over a holiday, but Steve was frustrated because they had to schedule around the brother's activities as a coach for his son's

baseball team. Instead of calmly talking with each other about the times in his schedule that would work, the two men argued forcefully about how the other was never willing to be flexible.

The discussion was very unpleasant, and Steve explained to me, "I've been trying all my life to get through to that bird-brained brother of mine, but I don't suppose we'll ever have any luck with good communication. The only language he understands is bluntness. But even when I shoot straight with him, he'll find a way to turn it into a bad scene."

When I mentioned that he could choose to stand his ground without being drawn into a verbal sparring match, he reacted negatively. "It wouldn't do any good if I somehow could enlist someone like Mother Teresa to negotiate on my behalf. I've never had much success talking about problems with my brother, and I don't expect that to change anytime soon."

Like many angry people, Steve mistakenly assumes that when others handled conflict poorly, his ability to be emotionally calm is lost. In his past, he experienced hundreds, if not thousands, of episodes where he could not be assured of a pleasing outcome. Failing to believe in his own ability to manage anger reasonably when faced with an argumentative person, his emotions took on a negative tone that led him to react poorly.

Individualized Responsibility

A relieved and liberating feeling can come upon people when I talk with them about the truth that their anger may actually have a valid purpose. When people are trained to think of anger in strictly negative terms, it may be a real eye-opener for them to learn that it is both good and necessary to be honest about what is bugging them. Most have mishandled their anger so readily that they have not had many people reinforce the notion that it can be appropriate to preserve personal worth and needs and convictions.

When I work with people trying to make sense of their anger, I emphasize the necessity of separating their emotion from the emotional response of the people who provoke ill feeling. "When you take your cues from others," I explain, "there's no telling where you might go in the expression of your anger. Because the people in your presence may not have taken the time to contemplate their own emotional management, you're setting yourself up for failure when you handle your anger on the basis of the behaviors of those people."

To be released from your anger trap, you need to think in individualized terms. As a boy or girl, you were not mature enough to know how to put emotional distance between yourself and others for the purpose of

forging ahead with your own well-devised plans for anger management. In your late teens and early adult years, you may have developed habits of responding poorly to conflict, and those habits may have become the foundation for your current way of responding to friction.

As long as you float through life without a well-conceived plan for anger management and without developing insights regarding your vulnerability to this emotion, you can expect to remain trapped in frequent and ongoing pain. It is a virtual certainty that others will not be able to make you feel calm enough to free you from debilitating anger. The only person who can ultimately make improvements that tame your anger is you. Without an individualized plan for anger management, your emotions resemble the actions of a pinball in an arcade, bouncing from one poorly conceived response to the next.

Steve was at a crossroads in his life. As a middle-aged man who had experienced numerous relationship breakdowns, both in his family life and in business affairs, he knew he did not want the same trend to carry him into his retirement years. Yet because he always tended to point toward others to give evidence for his bad temper, he had made very little headway in emotional maturation.

"Steve, we can proceed with optimism if you will determine that you can lay down your blaming habits and choose to take a long, hard look at your anger management style. The fact that you feel anger so strongly tells me that you're in pain. I'm willing to help you, but it will require that you take full responsibility for your own emotional well-being."

Steve was not sure if he was ready to buy into my line of reasoning, so he replied, "How am I supposed to stop being angry when I am exposed to idiots and I have to put up with foul treatment from so many people? Are you telling me that I've got to turn into some sort of pansy and just let people walk all over me as if I just didn't care? If that's what you have in mind, I can tell you right now that you can count me out."

My response was simple. "Steve, I doubt I'd ever be able to turn you into a pansy, so you can set aside your worries about that. What I'm suggesting is straightforward. You had poor models of anger management when you were growing up, and your anger has so consumed you throughout your adult years that you have known little success in handling conflict. I'm assuming that you'd like to get out of this trap, but it's going to be largely up to you if you can succeed or not. I can help you ferret out the choices you have for handling anger, and I can talk with you about some of the underlying thought patterns that steer anger in the wrong direction. The rest is up to you. This is your life, and ultimately you and you alone are responsible for how it turns out."

Anger is not a mysterious emotion in the sense that it cannot be readily understood. In the pages to follow, we first explore how anger can be expressed, both positively and negatively. We also uncover some of the relational patterns that can keep you stuck in a web of anger, with the understanding that you can choose to be released from unhealthy patterns as you identify better alternatives.

Let me offer you a word of encouragement. When I first met Steve, I did not see many overt signs indicating we could expect a positive outcome from counseling. Initially he was defensive, and he easily minimized the debilitating effects anger had created in his life. Nonetheless, I persuaded him to participate in a six-week anger workshop, and afterward we reconvened for some individual discussion.

In our first meeting after the workshop, Steve remarked, "In all the things we learned in there, one thought stood out above all the others." He paused momentarily, and he then said, "I have choices." Hearing the emphatic way he made that statement, you would have thought that he had just discovered the key to all of life's problems . . . and perhaps he had. Though he had felt bound to his history of poor choices when anger arose, he now saw that he could replace those old maladaptive choices with more appropriate, constructive ones. He had never taken the time previously to contemplate the enormous good that could arise from such a realization.

As the weeks passed, we continued to discuss the changes of thought that were required for him to shift from unhealthy to healthy emotional management. His anger did not go away, but his use of anger changed drastically.

So it can be with you. Consider this simple analogy. Suppose you grew up in a home where English was the only language spoken. If I challenged you today to learn to speak in French, could you do so? *Oui,* but it would be a major effort. You would need special tutoring, and time to learn the new vocabulary and sentence structure. Nonetheless, with persistence it can be done.

The same can be said for restructuring your style of handling anger. Just as learning a new language is no quick and easy task, you cannot expect your anger to be changed overnight. But just as you can incorporate new lingual habits, you can expect to do the same with your emotional habits.

Proceed with the confidence that your awareness and insight can lead you to choose a more productive path. We begin by outlining in the next two chapters the choices that are yours when anger arises. Once you learn to sift out bad choices from good, you will then be ready to delve into the reasons you tend to choose as you do.

For Personal Reflection

- What are some common occurrences that trigger your anger? What do you wish to communicate in your anger?
- What is legitimate about your feelings of anger?
- What do you tend to do that causes the legitimate message of your anger to be lost?
- How does your management of anger leave you feeling trapped?
- What painful experiences from your past help keep your current feelings of anger alive?
- Why do you have difficulty accepting the reality that people can be rejecting or insensitive in the midst of conflict?
- How would your management of anger change if you chose to accuse less and assume individual responsibility for your emotional balance?