

PUT OUT THE
FIRE

EDDIE
SPENCER

WITH LAFON WALCOTT BURROW

PUT OUT THE
FIRE

HOW TO CONTROL YOUR ANGER
BEFORE IT DESTROYS YOUR LIFE

REDEMPTION  PRESS

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Dedication

To my darling wife Betty—I thank God that you are in my life. God has used you to help me to grow into being the man He wants me to be. I appreciate your love, support, commitment, patience and prayers.

To my precious daughter Sharon (Daddy's Baby Girl), and my beloved sons Lincoln and Reginald—I am grateful and privileged that you are a part of my life. My prayer for each of you is that you will be all that the Lord Jesus Christ wants you to be.

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In Memory

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Preface

Have you ever said any of the following things to yourself or to somebody else?

- I run my own life. You can't tell me what to do.
- Right this minute I'm so angry I could kill you.
- I will never apologize for what I've done. Never.
- If you don't like who I am, that's too bad; I can't change.
- Who do you think you are, you stupid so-and-so? You can't do that to me!
- Whatever you do to me, I'm gonna do right back to you.
- I may forgive, but I won't forget. Not ever.

If you have, then this is the book for you. Its purpose is to take a look at the problem of anger and how it affects your life and the lives of those around you, and then offer you a proven solution for dealing effectively with your anger. It's designed to be useful to you whether you are a man or a woman, a young person or an adult, a true believer in God or a total skeptic who doesn't yet know Jesus Christ.

This three-part study guide begins by discussing five heart attitudes that set off anger, goes on to consider eight negative

effects of uncontrolled anger in your life, and concludes by sharing seven steps you must take in order to deal with your anger before it destroys you, your family, and your future.

Each chapter in the book takes a persuasive look at some things the Bible has to say about anger as well as some of the author's own life experiences and then moves on to make things more personal to you. Through a series of thought-provoking questions, you will be challenged to think matters over for yourself. Next, you will be asked to take a positive action step designed to help you begin to resolve your anger. Finally, you will be given the opportunity to talk things over with God in prayer and to reflect on the truth of what God's Word has to say regarding you and your anger. How you respond to each of these sections will reveal to you where you are right now in regard to living life God's way, and perhaps motivate you to deal truthfully with the things keeping you in bondage to your destructive anger.

There are several ways you can use this study guide. First, you can read it by yourself. You can do this a chapter at a time or you can read it straight through. How you choose to do it is up to you, but if you elect to read the book all at once, you are more likely to miss the opportunities to make it personal. So, if you decide to do it that way, you would be wise to go back through the book a second time and take longer to do the sections that make it personal.

You can also use this study guide with a group. It would be best to have someone qualified to lead your group; but if you don't, it is possible to use the guide without a leader by reading the material on your own and then discussing it together as a group. To make the study more effective, you might want to be accountable to each other by sharing the results of your efforts to take the action steps. Doing the study with a group will provide a chance for you to encourage one another as well as the opportunity for you to pray for each other.

You could do this study together one-on-one with a counselor, a mentor, your spouse, or your parents. To do this, you would want to set aside a regular time to go over the material in the book. In order for the study to be used effectively in this way, everyone

PREFACE

involved must remember this should not be a time to argue with each other or lay blame. Instead, it should be an opportunity to focus on what the study guide has to say to you about anger and then to apply that material to your OWN life or to be supportive of the person who is struggling with anger.

However you decide to use this material, you will find the study informative, effective, and personal to your situation. God understands the struggle you are in, as well as what it will take to set you free from bondage to your angry emotions. Moreover, God deeply desires to bring you out of your present circumstances and into right relationship with Himself and the people around you.

Just give God a chance; He can do what you can't do on your own.

About The Author

If anyone knows what anger can cost you, it's Eddie Charles Spencer. It nearly destroyed his whole life.

The seventh of eleven children, Eddie was born in 1962 in Hollandale, a Mississippi Delta plantation town, where he grew up among the poorest of the poor. He and the rest of his large family lived all jammed up in a shabby three room shack with no indoor plumbing and no air-conditioning. Even as a child, he felt the hopelessness in the world around him where black folks lived trapped in poverty and rejection. Eddie also experienced the abuse of his father who took his own frustrations out on his son.

It didn't take long for Eddie to grow angry himself. Life-changing rage first showed up when he was six years old. His only pair of shoes had fallen apart and his mother sent him off to school wearing his sister's shoes. As he stepped into his first grade classroom, classmates taunted him: "Look at Eddie Spencer. He's got little girl shoes on!" Humiliation and revenge gripped his young mind and launched him on a journey of crime and violence that began at school and quickly spread to the streets. He was arrested the first time when he was seven years old and spent his first night in jail at nine. Before he turned fifteen, he had dropped out of school, been shot four times, been sentenced to training school six times,

and even tried to shoot his abusive father. Addicted to drugs and robbing to support that habit, the teenager's anger escalated to violence that spiraled out of control and kept him in trouble with the law. In 1980, just short of his seventeenth birthday, he found himself standing before a judge receiving ten years mandatory at Parchman Penitentiary for armed robbery and attempted murder.

Being locked up at Parchman only fueled Eddie's anger and made him more determined no one would get the best of him. Trying to earn himself a prison reputation, he began to box and became a loan-shark. These activities earned him the name he wanted, but eventually took him to the place he decided to murder two men just to increase his reputation. As he sat on his prison cot fingering his homemade knife contemplating that murder, he remembered the words of one of his robbery victims: "You can have the money, but what you really need is to give your life to the Lord Jesus Christ."

Immediately, Eddie knew what he must do. He put away his "shank" and made the choice that changed his heart and gave him a new start at life.

Paroled from prison in 1988, Eddie Spencer is now an ordained minister of the gospel and motivational speaker. In the years since he left jail, he has attended Belhaven College, served as urban director of Young Life Jackson, owned several restaurants, worked with St. Andrews Mission in McComb, MS, and served as a pastor at Alta Woods United Methodist Church in Jackson and White Oak United Methodist Church in Crystal Springs, MS.

In 1990, Eddie was honored by USA Today as one of its fifty national drug-fighting heroes. He was also selected to be a part of the Presidential Drug Task Force, and awarded the WLBT-TV3 "Catch the Spirit" Award. The story of his life is told in the book *INMATE 46857: If God Can Change Me, He Can Change Anybody*, which he co-authored with LaFon Walcott Burrow, as well as included in the book *The Day I Met God*.

Eddie is married and has a daughter and two sons.

A Word From The Author Before You Begin

I am convinced this study can make a difference in your life, but before you begin, I want to talk with you about two ways of thinking which can keep you from dealing with your anger.

The first mindset that will prevent you from overcoming anger is refusing to recognize you have a problem. The truth is until you and I are willing to admit there's something wrong in our lives, we will never do anything about it.

When I was growing up, people used to say to me, "Eddie, you need to get your anger under control before you hurt somebody or destroy your own life." Only I wouldn't listen. Because I was in denial, I wasn't interested in recognizing or dealing with the problems in my life, and I didn't want to hear what anybody had to say to me about my situation.

Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." In 1 John 1:8-9 we read, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Unfortunately, I wasn't willing to see the sinful anger at work in my heart. I knew I had a quick temper, but I unrealistically thought

I had it under control. The truth was I did a lot of foolish things and I said a lot of hurtful things when I lost control and got angry. Proverbs 14:17 says, “A quick-tempered man does foolish things.” Even though I couldn’t see it, I was acting foolishly because of my temper and with time things only got worse. Finally, I reached the place my anger showed up all the time. Any little thing would set me off. When someone said or did something to me that I didn’t like, I’d strike out immediately or I would hold those things in and eventually get even. I couldn’t just let things go. Instead, I became revengeful and argumentative, using sharp and painful words or physical violence to hurt others. Still, I continued to say I didn’t have a problem with anger.

What about you? Are you saying the same thing I used to say? Are you ashamed to acknowledge you have a problem? Do you find yourself blaming others for your anger rather than owning up to your own responsibility in the matter? What will it take for you to face reality? Don’t wait as long as I did and end up imprisoned by your anger. Now is the time to turn things around.

A second way of thinking that will prevent you from dealing with your anger is believing there is no way you can change.

When I finally reached the place I could no longer deny I was the angry young man others were saying I was, I began to say I couldn’t change because that was just the way I was. When others tried to talk to me about my anger, I’d tell them this was who I was, and if they didn’t like it, they didn’t have to talk to me or be around me. I liked to say I couldn’t help who I was and I couldn’t change. In fact, I took pride in what I was doing. I know now how very foolish that attitude was. Proverbs 10:23 says, “A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct.” All my attitude did was make me foolishly stay exactly the way I was.

What about you? Have you told yourself the same lie I told myself? Do you think you can’t change? Are you convinced you will always be the way you are now? I want to tell you that you can change, but not by yourself. You’ve probably already tried to turn things around at some point and failed. Maybe you’ve even tried dealing with your anger time and time again and always failed. If

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR BEFORE YOU BEGIN

so, I have some good news for you. The Lord Jesus Christ can and will do what you can't do on your own. Jesus says in Mark 10:27, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." And the prophet Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 32:17, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you."

You may be asking in your mind and heart whether God can really change the mess you've made of your life because of your attitude and actions. The answer is yes. Paul says in Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Paul also says in Philippians 2:13, "[Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure *and* satisfaction *and* delight." (Amplified Bible)

Think about it and take the time to complete this book before you decide there's no way you can change. The Lord Jesus Christ is waiting to empower you to do what you can't do yourself. Scripture puts it this way: "I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me. [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency]. Philippians 4:13 (Amplified Bible)

God understands your struggles and the attitudes of your heart better than anyone else. Why not give Him a chance to deal with your anger and turn things around for you?

TALKING TO GOD BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Father God, be with me as I study this book. Enable me to be honest with myself and to take responsibility for my anger and my actions. Bring me to the place I can confess I have a problem with anger and forgive me for believing the lie that I can not change. Teach me to control my anger before it destroys me, my family, and my future.
AMEN



If you are feeling afraid right now about confronting your anger or if you found it difficult to pray this prayer, it's OK. Don't give up on the book or put it down; take a chance and read on. You won't be sorry you did.



Part I

Five Attitudes That Set Off Anger

Everybody gets angry or upset. It's not getting angry that's the problem; it's how you express those feelings of anger that determines whether you are sinning or not. The Amplified Bible puts it this way: "When angry do not sin, do not ever let your wrath, your exasperation, your fury, or indignation last until the sun goes down. Leave no room or foothold for the devil, give no opportunity to him."

—Ephesians 4:26-27

That's not all the Bible has to say about anger. It also defines for us what anger is, why it shows up, and how it can be overcome. Not only does the Word offer a lot of helpful wisdom on recognizing and dealing with sinful anger, it includes many examples of people who struggled with anger. You and I can profit from looking at those people and seeing the consequences of anger in their lives.

I wish I had done that when I was young and just getting started with my anger; only I didn't. Instead, I took pride in my anger. I'd say, "Everybody gets angry. This is just who I am. If you don't like it, you don't have to be around me." I didn't realize at the time how harmful and destructive that attitude was. Yes, I was right when I said everyone gets angry or upset about something in life. Anger is a God-given emotion that enables us to deal with things that are

displeasing and uncomfortable for us. God allows us to be angry, but does not want us to sin by holding onto our anger and letting it get out of control.

Some of you might be thinking like I used to think that it's impossible for you to avoid your anger. Or you might be thinking if you let your anger go, you'll look weak and others might take advantage of you. The truth is it takes a strong person, not a weakling, to avoid anger or control it when it does show up. Solomon says in Proverbs 14:29, "A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly."

Getting upset, developing a vengeful attitude, committing violent actions, thinking negative thoughts, becoming argumentative, raising your voice, using sharp words or cursing, as well as holding things in and refusing to let them go are all symptoms of not controlling your anger. What's more, the longer you ignore your anger and don't deal with it, the worse it will get. David tells us in Psalm 37:8: "Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil." With these words, he is warning you and me to deal with our anger because it only leads to increasing consequences.

In order to really understand what anger is and how to control it, you must first identify what is creating your anger. So let's take a look at five attitudes identified in Scripture that set off anger in your life and mine just as surely as fire ignites gasoline.

One

Rebellion

For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.

—1 Samuel 15:23

Nobody can tell me what to do. It's my life, and I'm gonna live it the way I want to live it. “

That was my rebellious attitude when I was growing up. Before I was even a teenager, I thought I knew what was best for me, and I didn't want anyone telling me what to do. I figured if I could get out from under my parents and the other authority figures in my life, I'd be able to do my own thing and live the way I wanted. When I looked around me at others who were living any way they chose, their lives appeared very good to me. Wanting to be just like them, I started playing hookie from school, running the streets, and breaking the law. Eventually, I found myself using drugs and robbing people in their homes and in the street. I thought this lifestyle would make me happy and untouchable; only I was wrong.

Proverbs 16:25 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” 1 Corinthians 8:2 says, “The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.”

Of course, I had no use for the truth of Scripture back then. In my rebellion, I thought I knew it all. I know now if I had only listened to those in authority over me, my life might have been so different. If I hadn't been as rebellious and angry as I was, I'm positive I wouldn't have been in and out of training school six times before I reached the age of fifteen; I don't believe I would have had to experience the shame and embarrassment of not being able to read; I certainly don't think I would have found myself standing in front of a judge before I even turned seventeen years old receiving ten years mandatory at Parchman Penitentiary for armed robbery and attempted murder. I realize now all of these things happened to me because I had a defiant attitude which led me to think nobody could tell me what to do, and that rebellious spirit of mine almost cost me everything.

It's easy to see that the rebellion in my life produced anger, and that anger produced violence, and then that violence produced destruction in my life. We also see this pattern recorded in Scripture in the life of Cain. Genesis 4:1-13 says:

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother, Abel?"

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is more than I can bear.”

Even though God’s plan called for bringing firstfruits as a sacrifice, Cain ignored God’s instructions and chose something else. Because of his rebellious choice, God didn’t accept Cain’s offering. On the other hand, Cain’s brother Abel brought what God required when he offered the firstborn of his flock, and God accepted his offering.

Not only did Cain’s rebellion lead him to disobey God, it also led him to get angry. Scripture puts it this way: “So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.” Things didn’t stop there. Even when God gave Cain a second chance to correct the problem, he didn’t. Instead, Cain continued to rebel against God and allowed anger to take control. We learn this in Genesis 4:7 where it says: “The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.’”

Cain should have listened to God; instead, he did what seemed right in his own mind, and sin slipped in and took control. In fact, his choice brought him to the place his anger led him to murder his own brother. Scripture records that event this way: “Now Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let’s go out to the field.’ And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.”

What a perfect picture of how rebellion produces anger, anger produces violence, and violence produces destruction. And this whole process could have been avoided if Cain had just ignored his rebellious desires and heeded God’s instructions instead.

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

What about you? Do you have a rebellious attitude? Are you saying that it's your life and nobody can tell you what to do? Not your parents. Not your husband or wife. Not your fiancé or your boss or your teachers. Not the police. Not even God.

If so, listen to what Scripture has to say that applies to your situation:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

—Proverbs 1:7

A fool spurns (despises) his father's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.

—Proverbs 15:5

A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.

—Proverbs 18:2

Would you rather be a fool or would you like to begin to deal with your rebellious refusal to heed the advice and boundaries of others? You must decide. It's up to you.

THINKING IT OVER

- Do you hate it when someone else tells you what to do?
- Do you become defensive and argumentative when somebody tries to correct or challenge you?
- Do you get angry when you can't have your way?
- Do you normally put your own feelings before the feelings of others?

If you answered yes to one or more of the questions above, you could have a rebellious spirit that is producing anger in your life. Take some time and think it over. Perhaps you might like to read the questions again and reflect on your life to get a true picture

of how rebellion is affecting it. Then, you might want to begin to defuse your rebellious attitude by taking one or both of the actions steps that follow.

TAKING A POSITIVE ACTION STEP

- When someone asks you to do something in the days ahead that makes you so angry you want to resist, don't let your anger take control like you normally do. Instead, stop and ask God to help you submit. You just might be surprised at what happens!
- Identify a person or a group of people who is influencing you by encouraging you to rebel. The next time you are asked to do something rebellious, don't go along with the crowd. Instead, think of a way you can break away from them and make a better choice for yourself. If you find that hard to do, consider asking God to help you. You might want to start with the prayer below.

TALKING TO GOD

Heavenly Father, I believe I have a rebellious attitude fueling anger in my life. Give me the wisdom to see the truth about myself so I can quit fighting against the authorities and boundaries in my life. Help me not to get angry when asked or told to do something by my parents, my spouse, my teacher, my boss, or my friends. Destroy any rebellious spirit in me and enable me to submit to You and to the people in my life like I should. AMEN

HEARING FROM GOD'S WORD

In your anger do not sin; when you lie on your beds search your heart and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord.

—Psalm 4:4-5

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

—Proverbs 1:7

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.

—Proverbs 3:7

My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life.

—Proverbs 6:20-23

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you.

—Deuteronomy 5:16

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

—Hebrews 12:7-11

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

—1 Peter 2:13-14

Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

REBELLION

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

—1 Peter 5:5-6



2 Timothy 3:16 says: "All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

In light of this truth, you might want to seriously consider how Scriptures like those above could be helpful to you in understanding how anger is affecting your life and what you must do to get free from its control.

To help you use these Scriptures, you might want to write down one or more of them and either carry them with you or put them in a place where you can see them. Better yet, you might want to memorize them. They will help you remember the truth about how your rebellious spirit is destroying your life.

