

LEARNING SELF-CONTROL

Ten Values for God's People

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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When would God's people ever misuse God's name? When they lose it. The value behind the 3rd Commandment, **Exodus 20:7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God"** is SELF-CONTROL. **James 3:2-9** teaches if you can control your mouth, then you can control your **"whole body"**. The tongue is likened to the bit of a bridle, the rudder of a ship, and a small spark capable of setting a great forest on fire. So this lesson is primarily on CONTROLLING YOUR ANGER. Anger is not evil in itself. Jesus got angry. God made you with emotions. However if you don't learn how to use anger wisely, it will destroy you. If used correctly, managed anger actually becomes an asset. There are some things in life that the only proper response is to get angry...like to senseless violence, evil, and injustice. If we don't get angry in such situations then we don't care - and God made us to care. However, **"In your anger, do not sin"** (Ephesians 4:26). Here is how....

STEP 1) RESOLVE TO CONTROL IT Proverbs 29:11 ***A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.***

Quit saying you can't control it and start realizing you can. Memorize Philippians 4:13 ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*** Stop making excuses and start accepting responsibility for your reactions. Anger is an emotion...what you do with it is a choice. In the midst of an argument, the phone will ring and you are nice to the person calling. You have more control over your anger than you think you do. "Resolve" simply means to decide in advance. If you are serious about learning how to use anger rather than abuse it, you've got to start in advance....before you hit the boiling point.

STEP 2) REALIZE THE COST Proverbs 29:22 ***An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.***

You always lose when you lose your temper. You may lose your reputation, your children, the love of your spouse, your job. When you let anger go uncontrolled you always lose. There is a price tag... and it's not worth it. The Bible says you can even lose your own family (Proverbs 11:29). As parents, you might put the fear of God (or of you) in your children and they may give you short term obedience, but in the long term, you're going to lose. The ultimate result of anger is more anger back and finally just apathy...and alienation from those you may love the most.

STEP 3) RESTRAIN THE MOUTH Proverbs 21:23 ***He who guards his mouth and tongue keeps himself from calamity.*** James 1:19 ***Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry***

You cannot put your foot in your mouth when it is closed. Anger is largely a matter of mouth control. The more we talk, the more likely we are to say the wrong thing. If you are slow to speak and quick to listen, then you are inevitably going to be slow to anger. If you are slow to listen and quick to speak, you are going to be quick to anger. The ultimate form of emotional maturity is the ability to control your mouth. Some wrongly think they have a reservoir of anger inside that needs to be poured out. Wrong. You have a factory for anger in your heart. Studies show releasing anger creates more anger. Being aggressive actually creates more aggression. It does not relieve or reduce, it multiplies.

STEP 4) REFLECT BEFORE REACTING Proverbs 19:11 ***A man's wisdom gives him patience***

Delay is a tremendous remedy...but not indefinitely. If you've got an issue you need to deal with it. Anger delayed indefinitely becomes bitterness...and that is worse than anger. Bitterness is always a sin, anger isn't. If you respond impulsively, you will tend to respond in anger. If you allow time to cool, you are going to be more rational. Give yourself time to T-H-I-N-K...

T - Is it Truthful? Before you say it, is it the truth?

H - Is it Helpful? Or is it just going to harm?

I - Is it Inspirational? Does it build up or does it tear down?

N - Is it Necessary? If it's not necessary, don't say it?

K - Is it Kind?

Anger is a warning light that you are: hurt, frustrated, or afraid. It is easier to understand the cause than it is to deal with anger.

STEP 5) RELEASE ANGER APPROPRIATELY Proverbs 22:24 ***Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person or associate with one easily angered, lest you learn his ways...***

You don't suppress anger. If you swallow your anger, your stomach keeps score or your back or your headaches. If you don't talk it out, then you're going to take it out on your body.

You don't repress anger; that is denial. Eventually repression becomes depression. Many Christians think depression is ok and anger is not ok with God. Wrong. Read Psalms where David says, "God, life is unfair. My enemies are against me. Things are not going good...and I'm upset with you." God is not shocked. God can handle our anger. God wants our honesty. David goes on to say, "God, I know You are going to help me. You always have."

You don't express anger...inappropriately. We can blow up and damage others. We can pout so everyone walks on "pins and needles". We can be sarcastic and hurt with words. We can manipulate and get even actively with revenge or passively with indifference. We can do dumb things like drink.

You DO confess it. You not only admit it but you admit the cause. "I'm upset and here's why... I'm hurting; I'm frustrated, I'm afraid... I feel threatened." In relationships, the more honest you can be, the easier it is to deal with the root causes of your anger.

Here is the good news: Since inappropriate anger is learned, it can be unlearned. You do not have to go the rest of your life with ungodly anger. You can learn to control your anger appropriately. You CAN change. Maybe you grew up in a home where anger was focused on you in inappropriate ways. You don't have to do that to your kids/spouse/friends. You can change with God's help.

STEP 6) RETURN GOOD FOR EVIL Romans 12:21 ***Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.***

Booker T. Washington said, "I will never let another man control my life by making me hate him." When you say, "You make me mad" you're admitting, "You have the power to control my emotions." Retaliation just puts you on their level. Respond with good and it actually puts you in a superior position. God is a just God who is going to settle the score for injustice...not just here but in eternity.

STEP 7) REQUEST GOD'S HELP Psalms 141:3 ***Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.*** Matthew 12:34 ***Whatever is in your heart determines what you say.***

How does God help us? By going to the cause. Jesus says the heart of the issue is the issue of the heart. Like a toothpaste tube, under pressure...whatever is inside your heart comes out your mouth. Jesus explained the Freudian slip long before Freud. What we say shows our heart. When God changes us, God gives us a new heart. **Therefore if anyone be in Christ he is a new person inside. The old has gone, the new has come.** (2 Corinthians 5:17) **"Create in me a clean heart, O God."** (Psalms 51:10) God specializes in heart transplants. All the therapy in the world can't give you a new heart. Only God. Jesus says, "Insecure? You are God's child. Hurt? Here is comfort. Afraid? I am with you. Anxious? Here is my peace. Blown it? Here is forgiveness." Ask and receive God's **spirit of power, of love, and of self control.** (2 Timothy 1:7) Christians, value and learn self-control.