

Developing Self-Control

Proverbs 25:28

Anything that is uncontrolled eventually will destroy you. It can be eating, drinking, sex, television, chocolate, spending, anything that is left uncontrolled in your life, even good things, even things that God created, will eventually destroy you. As we continue in our series on life's values, we have come to the place of discussing **Self Control.**

This is not exactly a quality that a lot of people want to talk about today. We are not really into self-discipline. We are into whatever feels good, do it. **Whatever you like to do, do.** If it feels good, do it. If you don't feel like doing it, don't worry about it. If I had put out a big billboard that said, "Come tonight to hear about self discipline" some of you would have stayed home and watched whatever was on TV. Self-discipline is not exactly an area people want to talk about.

A recent article concerning the Baby Boom generation was entitled, "The temper tantrum of a generation comes home to roost." **What are they talking about?** Tonight I want to talk specifically about and look at what God has to say about one particular area of self control and that is controlling your anger. This is an area that all of us have to deal with in one way or the other. **Self control is not just for those who blow up.** It is also for those who clam up. **Most people have one of two reactions to anger in life.** **They are either a skunk or a turtle.** When a skunk gets in trouble, he stinks the place up. He lets it rip and everybody knows when the skunk is upset! **On the other hand, the turtle folds himself into his shell.** He hides, he cowers down. They don't blow up; they just clam up.

I have noticed an unusual trend in our society, and that is that skunks usually marry turtles. One of you tend to let it all hang out

when you get angry and the other one tends to withdraw and be a little bit more reserved. Both of those are inappropriate forms of anger. So both skunks and turtles need to learn how to deal with how we feel, how to handle our emotions so that we are not overwhelmed by them. And that is what we are going to look at that tonight.

In our society it is very obvious we don't know how to handle anger. Violence is on the increase. Crime is on the increase. Profanity is on the increase. I could spend 10-15 minutes talking about statistics that you all know about. Half of all murders actually occur between family members. There are 342 children arrested for violent crimes every day, 14 children are murdered every day. People are getting angry about little things. It seems like, as the frustration level rises, so does the anger.

Tonight we are going to look at is what God has to say about how to develop self-control. Anger is not evil in itself. Anger is not a sin. God gets angry, so obviously it is not a sin. The Bible says that Jesus got angry. It is how you express your anger that matters. When God made you, He wired you up in such a way that you could get angry. God gave you the capacity to get angry.

So I am not saying that God wants us to get rid of all anger. What I am saying is God wants you to learn to manage your anger. In the book of Proverbs, God gives us seven specific suggestions or steps, keys, secrets.

If we are ever going to learn to control our anger, we must learn these seven keys:

1. Resolve to control it. Stop confessing that you can not control your anger and start realizing you can. The Bible says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." So you stop making excuses and start accepting responsibility for your reactions.

Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool gives full vent to his anger but a wise man keeps himself under control." Notice the word "keeps." **That is an act of the will; it is something that you must choose to do.** If you do not get anything else I say, get this: Anger is a choice, just like every other emotion. Anger is a choice. **When I worry, that is my choice.** When I get depressed, that is my choice because I do not have to be. When I get discouraged, I am choosing to be discouraged. **When I am happy, I am choosing to be happy.** And when I am angry, I am choosing to be angry.

Resolve simply means to decide in advance. This is the first key. If you are serious about learning how to use anger rather than abuse it, you have to start in advance.

2. I need to realize the cost. If I realize that all anger has a price tag, I am more likely to control it. When I realize the cost of uncontrolled anger then I am less likely to give into it.

The Bible is very specific about the cost of uncontrolled anger. Proverbs 29:22 says, "A hot tempered man gets into all kinds of trouble." The Bible is the true word of God, whether you believe it or not. **How many of you agree that hot tempers cause arguments? That anger causes mistakes? That people with hot tempers do foolish things? Have you ever seen somebody really mad do something absolutely stupid and make a fool of themselves?** Well, we do. There are all kinds of costs involved. You are never going to reach your full potential if you keep losing your cool.

Proverbs 11:29 says, "The fool who provokes his family to anger and resentment will finally have nothing worthwhile left." **You always lose when you lose your temper.** You may lose your reputation, your children, the love of your husband or wife, your job. When you let anger go uncontrolled in your life you always, always lose. **There is always a price tag to uncontrolled anger.** And it is not worth it. The

Bible says you can even lose your own family and finally have nothing worthwhile left.

3. I must restrain my mouth. I have got to learn to think before I speak, because inevitably anger control is mouth control. Proverbs 21:23 reads like this in the New Living Translation, "If you keep your mouth shut you will stay out of trouble." **That would be a great memory verse this week.** Have you noticed that you cannot put your foot in your mouth when it is closed? The Bible says, "Even a fool is considered wise if he says nothing." **Keep your mouth shut and you will stay out of trouble.** God says anger is largely a matter of mouth control.

4. I need to reflect before reacting. The Bible says this in Proverbs 29:11, "A stupid man gives free reign to his anger but a wise man waits and lets it grow cool." Notice the word "waits." The Bible is saying, "Think before you speak. Do not respond immediately." **A wise man waits and lets it grow cool.** That is the way you deal with it.

What do you do when you think? Five things T-H-I-N-K. Here is what you ought to do before you speak.

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?

Some things are not necessarily wrong, they are just not necessary so you do not need to say it.

K - Is it Kind?

THINK before you speak. Reflect before reacting.

What do you do during that delay, while you are waiting? You try to figure out why you are angry. You try to analyze and ask yourself three questions:

- 1. Why am I angry?** What's the cause behind it?
- 2. What do I really want?**
- 3. How can I get it?**

5. I need to release my anger appropriately. Ephesians 4:26 says, "If you become angry, don't let your anger lead you into sin." **It is not automatically a sin to get angry.** There are appropriate ways and there are inappropriate ways to get angry. There are helpful ways and there are harmful ways.

The Bible says, "Keep away from angry, short tempered people or you will learn to be like them." **Here is a very important point: How you express your anger is a learned behavior.** It does not just come natural. You learned to be a pouter. You learned to be a manipulator. You learned to be an exploder.

Here is the good news. Since that inappropriate anger is learned, it can be unlearned. You do not have to go the rest of your life being sarcastic or a pouter or a maniac or a mute or a martyr or any of those other things. **You can learn to express anger appropriately.** That is your choice. And not only that, God says, "You can change, because I will give you the power to do it."

6. Learn to return good for evil. Never let other people control you by choosing to react to them. Booker T. Washington once said, "I will never let another man control my life by making me hate him." When you say, "You make me mad" you are admitting "They control me. They have the power to control my emotions." **You are going to be hurt in life.** You are going to be disappointed and people are going to do bad things to you. **Therefore, you must decide your response.**

7. **Request God help with your anger.** Psalm 141:3 says, "Lord, help me control my tongue. Help me to be careful about what I say." **How does God help?**

He changes your mind. **He changes your heart.** He gives you His peace to replace your frustration. **When you say,** "God, I just can't control it!" **He says,** "That's OK, I can. Trust Me." **Anger dissipates and the peace that passes understanding comes in.**