

Controlling Our Anger

Lesson 25

Purpose To teach class members how to recognize and overcome feelings of anger.

Preparation

1. Prayerfully study Proverbs 16:32; Matthew 5:43–44; Mark 11:15–17; Ephesians 4:31–32; Colossians 3:8; James 1:19–20; 2 Nephi 1:26; 3 Nephi 11:29–30; Doctrine and Covenants 60:2; 63:32; 84:24.
2. Materials needed:
 - a. A picture of an angry person (cut one from a magazine or newspaper or draw one yourself).
 - b. A set of scriptures and a scripture marking pencil for each class member. Continue to encourage class members to bring their own scriptures to class each week.

Note to the teacher President Howard W. Hunter, fourteenth President of the Church, said: “We need to be slower to anger and more prompt to help. We need to extend the hand of friendship and resist the hand of retribution. In short, we need to love one another with the pure love of Christ . . . for that is the way God loves us” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 84; or Ensign, May 1992, 61). In this lesson, class members can learn ways to recognize and overcome feelings of anger. All of us can and must control these powerful emotions if we wish to receive a place in God’s kingdom.

Suggested Lesson Development

What Is Anger?

Picture discussion Show the picture of an angry person.

- How do you think this person is feeling?
- What kinds of things make you angry? (Allow only a minute or two for discussion of this question.)
- What is the world’s attitude toward anger?

Using popular books, songs, movies, or television shows as examples, if possible, point out that many people in the world believe that anger is an acceptable reaction to situations we do not like and that violence and revenge are acceptable ways of dealing with anger.

Scripture discussion

- What is the Lord’s attitude toward anger?

To answer this question, have class members read and mark 3 Nephi 11:29–30 and Ephesians 4:31–32. Have one or two class members read these verses aloud.

Point out that in 3 Nephi 11:29–30 Christ tells us that anger is not part of his gospel and “should be done away.” In Ephesians 4:31–32 the Apostle Paul emphasizes that anger and similar feelings must be “put away.”

Discussion

- How can anger be harmful to us? (Discuss with class members how anger affects us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.)
- What would the world be like if people did not get angry?

Allow class members to discuss this question for a few minutes. Answers may include that disagreements would be solved more easily; people would have more peace and spiritual strength; and there would be happier families and neighborhoods, fewer violent crimes, less abuse, little or no divorce, and probably fewer problems between nations.

Explain that anger is a natural human response, but it is one we must overcome to become like Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Learning to recognize our anger and deal with it appropriately can help us overcome it.

Recognizing Reasons for Anger

Story and discussion

Write on the chalkboard (at least several inches from the top) *We get angry because:* and then relate the following incident:

Janice and Denise were in the same school club and had become friends. One day Janice told Denise that she thought the club president was cute. Denise, who also thought this boy was cute and wanted his attention, began saying unkind things about Janice to other club members, including the president, hoping to make Janice look bad.

- How do you think Janice feels? Do you think Janice has a right to be angry at Denise? Why or why not?

Under the first phrase on the chalkboard, write *We feel we have been treated unfairly.*

Quotation

Have a class member read the following statement:

“Anger is [used] to control others. Some people have learned this art very well. They get what they want by becoming loud and angry. . . . Anger thus has the unrighteous goal of attempting to diminish the freedom of others” (Burton C. Kelly, “The Case Against Anger,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1980, 10).

Add to the list on the chalkboard *We want to get our own way.*

Story and discussion

Tell the following story:

When five-year-old Tommy went to the store with his mother, he spotted the rack of candy bars and headed straight for them. He asked his mother for a candy bar, but she told him he could not have one. Tommy immediately became angry and began screaming, crying, and stomping his feet. His mother was embarrassed and let him have a candy bar so he would be quiet. She vowed not to bring Tommy to the store again.

- Why did Tommy throw a tantrum? (To get his mother to buy him a candy bar.)
- Do youth and adults sometimes show anger for selfish reasons? Can you give an example?

Story and discussion

Tell the following story to illustrate a third reason we sometimes become angry:

Terry loved his little brother but sometimes thought he was a nuisance. One day while Terry was away at school, his little brother got into his room and took everything out of the closet and piled it on the bed.

When Terry got home and found the mess, he flew into a rage. He stormed around the house. When he could not find his brother, he became even angrier. Finally he found his brother playing in the neighbor's yard. He yelled at him, "Did you come in and mess up my bedroom?"

His little brother, shaking with fear, said, "I didn't mess up your room. I was cleaning the closet for you."

Add to the list on the chalkboard *We misunderstand*.

- How do you think Terry felt after his little brother explained what he was doing?
- How might Terry have reacted to the mess in his bedroom if he had correctly understood the situation? (You may want to point out that correctly understanding a situation does not necessarily make the situation all right, but it can help us deal with the situation in a more constructive way.)
- Have you ever become angry because you misunderstood someone else's intentions?

We Can Control Our Anger

Scripture discussion

Explain that regardless of the reason we become angry, we can control how we deal with our anger. On the chalkboard, above the list of reasons we get angry, write in large letters *We choose how to respond*.

Have each class member find and read one of the scriptures below. Have a class member read each scripture aloud, and discuss with class members what each scripture teaches us about controlling our anger.

1. Proverbs 16:32
2. Colossians 3:8
3. James 1:19–20

Chalkboard discussion

Remind class members of the story about Janice and Denise.

- How might Janice respond to Denise's unkind actions? (Have class members give as many possibilities as they can think of.)
- What might be the results of each of these responses? Which response would be best for Janice? for Denise?

Point out that some possible responses, such as seeking revenge, could be spiritually or physically harmful to both Janice and Denise.

- What are some positive ways we can deal with anger?

Discuss the following positive ways to deal with anger and any other methods class members suggest. List each method on the chalkboard as you discuss it.

1. Talk it out.

When we are angry with another person, we should talk with that person, if possible. As we talk, we should be calm and direct. Discussing problems calmly and directly can help dispel tensions and help us better understand the other person's actions.

2. Wait.

We should delay any action until we find a constructive way of dealing with our anger. For example, talking with the person who made us angry may be a good idea, but we may need to wait until we have calmed down first. Sometimes it helps to count to ten (or even more) before speaking or doing anything.

3. Pray.

Through prayer, we can ask Heavenly Father to help us deal with a particular situation that makes us angry. We can also ask him to take away our anger and help us forgive.

4. Exercise.

Getting involved in physical activity away from the tense environment helps release the tension that anger produces.

Discussion

- How can controlling your feelings of anger bring you more satisfaction than seeking revenge or expressing anger in other ways?

Remind class members that our responsibility is to control our own behavior, including dealing appropriately with our anger. We should let the Lord take care of those who may have truly wronged us.

Overcoming Our Anger Helps Us Become More like Jesus Christ

Discussion

Explain that learning to control our actions when we get angry is an initial step in learning to overcome anger. Our ultimate goal is to learn not to become angry in the first place.

- Does the Lord become angry?

Ask class members to explain why they answered yes or no.

Class members may mention that the scriptures speak of the wrath (or anger) of God and that Christ was angry when he drove the money changers from the temple (see Mark 11:15–17). Point out that the Lord was not angry as we generally consider anger. He was not antagonistic; he showed no hostility or desire for revenge; he was not out of control. His anger is often called righteous anger. Its motivation is to bless God's children, manifest truth, and destroy wickedness (see 2 Nephi 1:26; D&C 60:2; 63:32; 84:24).

Quotation

Point out that Christ has given us guidelines on how to act when faced with a situation where anger is the usual response. Have a class member read the following statement by Elder ElRay L. Christiansen, who was an Assistant to the Twelve:

“Jesus set the example in personal conduct regarding anger when, although he had been falsely accused and made the subject of railings and mockery, he stood

majestically and completely composed before the perplexed Pontius Pilate. He did not retaliate in anger. Rather, he stood erect, poised, unmoved. His conduct was divine. What an example for all of us!

“Listen to these marvelous words of the Savior, the master teacher:

“‘Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

“‘But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.’ (Matt. 5:43–44.)” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, 28; or *Ensign*, June 1971, 38).

Discussion

- How can we show love for those who mistreat us?
- How can first controlling and then overcoming anger make us more like Christ?

Testimony

Testify that we must learn to overcome anger if we want to mature spiritually and become more like Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Remind class members that we can pray for Heavenly Father’s help in overcoming anger. You may wish to share a personal experience in which Heavenly Father helped you deal with anger.

Referring to the list on the chalkboard, encourage class members to use one of these positive responses next time they become angry.

Enrichment Activities

You may want to use one or more of these activities during the lesson.

1. Bring enough hymnbooks for class members to read the words to “School Thy Feelings” (*Hymns*, no. 336). Have all class members read the words in unison, or have one class member read the words aloud while the others follow along silently.

After the words have been read, tell the following story about the origin of this hymn:

The words to this hymn were written in 1869 by Charles W. Penrose, who later became a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Elder Penrose had been serving in the presidency of the Birmingham (England) Conference of the Church, and he had brought his own furniture to use in the office. When he was released from the calling and took his furniture home, he was accused by another Church member of stealing furniture belonging to the Church. This accusation hurt Elder Penrose’s feelings and made him angry toward the other man. Elder Penrose initially wanted to get back at the man, but instead he wrote the words to this hymn to help himself calm down and control his anger. (See George D. Pyper, *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns* [1939], 158–60; see also Orson F. Whitney, “A Hymn with a History,” *Improvement Era*, Oct. 1924, 1109–12.)

Read again the words to the chorus of the hymn, and remind class members that they will be able to act more wisely if they control their anger.

2. If *Family Home Evening Video Supplement* (53276) is available, show “Family Communication,” a five-minute segment.

3. Explain that by controlling our own anger, we can help others control their anger as well. Have class members read and mark Proverbs 15:1.

Put class members in pairs and give each pair one of the statements below to discuss (you may need to create more statements if you have a large class). Ask class members to think of two responses to their statements: one response containing “grievous words” that will create more anger and one “soft answer” that will defuse anger. When all pairs have thought of two answers, have each pair demonstrate their answers in a role play for the rest of the class.

- a. “Why don’t you watch where you’re going? You almost knocked me over.”
- b. “Your brother’s shirt is ugly.”
- c. “I didn’t vote for your sister for class president.”
- d. “Can’t we watch another television show? This one is dumb.”
- e. “Why haven’t you cleaned up that mess yet?”
- f. “You broke a family rule, so you can’t go to the party.”