

That Moment I Tried to Kill My Brother

I was five years old. Maybe six. I was doing homework, and my older brother was helping me. At some point, he decided that he did not want to help anymore. I was desperate though so I pleaded with him to continue helping me. He refused. I stabbed him in the hand with a pencil.

I was 12 years old. Maybe a bit older. I have no specific memory what I was doing. All I remember is that my older brother [1. My older brother is a great guy. And he was and is a great big brother. But, he did have the ability to bring out the beast in me.] made me angry about something. I picked up a metal air pump—one used to inflate bike tires, footballs, and basketballs—and I chased him down, swung it at his head, missed, and took a chunk out of the concrete wall.

I was 37 years old. It was Father's Day. My wife and I got into an argument about something so inconsequential that I literally have no memory what we were arguing about. She walked away, heading upstairs to our room. (We were in the den downstairs.) As she got to the stairs, we exchanged some final words. I got angry and punched a hole in the wall.

Anger. Rage. Outbursts of extreme emotion. I have dealt with all of those things for as long as I can remember. Most of the time, I am a calm and mild-mannered person. And for years, I have worked very hard at controlling my temper. After I attempted to bash my brother's head in with the pump, my dad told me in no uncertain terms that if I didn't get my anger under control, I would end up in prison. He was absolutely right. And hearing my dad say that scared me. From that point on, I have been battling with anger, and mostly beating it. It has not been easy, and there have been moments when I have failed completely. But I do believe that I have gotten better

at it over time. Here are some things that have helped me control my temper. I hope that they will be a help to anyone who like me has struggled with this problem. [2. I want to make it clear at the outset that not all of these points will apply to you. A few of them are universally applicable, but some of them could be unique to me, or to a select few.]

1. The type of anger that I am talking about here – the kind that causes you to explode in white-hot rage – it is a sin. Don't sugarcoat it. Don't pretend it is not a big deal. Losing control of your emotions is not pleasing to God. Proverbs [3. Proverbs 15:18, 29:22, 33:33, 14:29, 19:11] is full of warnings about controlling our anger. We are fools if we do not. James tells us in verses 19 and 20 of chapter 1 that we should be slow to anger because our anger can never make things right in God's eyes.

2. If you have anger issues, it is not a problem that will simply go away. It is a weakness you will deal with for the rest of your life. You might as well get used to that. You need to view your temper the same way a recovering alcoholic views beer. Or a person fighting a pornography addiction views lust and temptation. It can and will rear its head when you least expect it. Never let down your guard. I made that mistake last year. I thought I had it under control. It had been so long since I had lost my temper like that. It shamed me after it happened. I sat there all alone in the den and cried. I was so embarrassed by my lack of self-control. I say that not to discourage anyone. I say it to make it clear that this is a life-long battle. Suit up and be ready to fight.

3. Be open about it with people you love. If your spouse knows that you have anger issues, he or she will be more likely to pray for you, to work with you, and to encourage you. I go back to my dad and the talk he gave me. He was blunt and to the point, but he said those things out of love and concern for me. It was because of that concern, but also that directness, that I realized that the uncontrolled anger is a

big deal. After my recent tantrum, I went upstairs and told my wife what happened. She didn't get angry with me. She loved me. She forgave me. And then she patched up the wall because she is awesome.

4. The people you love the most will be your greatest sources of emotional outbursts. As I indicated before, this one might not apply to you. It applies to me, which makes me believe others deal with it as well. My wife and my kids are the people I love the most in the world. I feel more passionately about them than I do anyone else. It makes sense then, that sometimes that passion and that strong emotion can be expressed negatively. My brothers are good examples of this principle as well. People that are not close to me do not provoke my rage. This has been true for me as long as I can remember. If this does not apply to you, the principle still stands. Be on guard and be aware of the things that hit you the hardest.

5. Research and implement some techniques that will help diffuse your anger. This is not a one-size-fits-all sort of thing. What works for you might not work for me. So I'm not going to give a bunch of specifics. There are plenty of ideas that work. Do some reading on the subject. Test some things out. Things that have worked for me include walking away and going somewhere quiet. Solitude. Music. As I said, find a few things that will work for you. It helps.

6. Commit in your heart that you will never strike another person when you are angry. Look, as dumb and as embarrassing as it was for me to punch a hole in my wall, it would have been much worse if I had punched my wife. Maybe that makes you uncomfortable. Good. When you deal with anger like this, there are times you very nearly react without thinking. I say very nearly, because I don't believe anyone reacts entirely without thinking. There is a rational part of you still at work even at your most angry. That part needs to have some say in the matter. In fact, decide now that the rational part of you has

the first and last word. No matter how angry you get, you cannot allow it to cloud your judgment to the point where you strike another person. Period. [4. If you are or have been a victim of domestic violence, seek help immediately.]

7. Your anger, whether expressed or bottled up, affects you in ways you cannot imagine. Understanding this will make it clear that giving in to your anger is just not worth it. It will affect your relationships, your health, and your walk with God. Scripture is clear on this point as well. [5. Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 4:26-28, Genesis 4:5-8] Giving in to your anger will result in you doing a lot of stupid stuff. You don't want to be stupid, do you?

8. Take your anger to God. I left this one until the end on purpose. I wanted to make sure that it would not get overlooked. Like any sin, we cannot hope to overcome anger on our own. We need, absolutely need, divine aid. So, before any techniques, plans, or systems have any hope of working, God has to be involved. He has to be in charge. This requires prayer and an acknowledgment that without His help, your anger will always have the upper hand.

I realize that the audience for this article might be very small. Perhaps there are only a few of you out there that deal with anger as I do. Even if that is the case, I hope this has been and will be helpful. Remember, outbursts of anger are a sign you are giving into your sinful nature. Instead, cultivate those things that are pleasing to God: love, peace, patience, gentleness and self-control. These are works of the kingdom of God. Temper tantrums have no place there.