

GOD'S WORDS FOR OUR ANGER

PSALM 39

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Case Study:

Bill didn't think he was that different from anyone else. Sure, he "lost it" every-once-in-a-while with the kids, but who doesn't. Idiot drivers deserved a decent heckling (even if they can't hear it) if they are going to endanger and make everyone else on the road late. His wife, Susan, was the sensitive type, so you couldn't really take her opinion too seriously. She probably was uncomfortable with his aggressive-assertive style, but that's just because her family never really dealt with their issues.

At work people respected Bill. He got things done, so his boss really liked Bill and often told him how good it was to have Bill on staff to keep everyone "on their toes." Being a self-made man who had to overcome a lot to amount to anything, Bill was proud of these comments. He always feared being nothing or nobody, so these comments told him he was on the right track.

What Bill didn't like was the way that his boys argued with one another and their mother. The things they said sounded eerily familiar when Bill was willing to admit it. But he shook it off saying he wasn't going to let his kids have excuses for their temper. If he had settled for excuses, he wouldn't be where he is today.

Then it got to the point where the boys were brave enough to turn their anger on him. He had always been able to intimidate them "back in line." But now these arguments began to escalate; a couple even turned physical. When Bill told the boys they should honor their father they just rolled their eyes. Eventually they looked up the passage in Ephesians and told him not to provoke his kids to anger and mocked that they could use the Bible too.

Bill came to Susan for support when he was feeling down. She gave him little and said she had warned him many times these days would come. That turned the conversation nasty, but Susan had been silent long enough and wasn't going to let Bill justify his anger anymore. The argument ended with Bill going for a drive ("storming off" as Susan said).

Some conviction was starting to set in, but Bill was still resisting the idea that he had an anger problem. He has never hit anyone (unless you count the recent wrestling matches with the boys). They had had some good times as a family (but nobody could remember those right now). As he drove, Bill thought he should pray, but he didn't even know where to begin.

Pre-Questions:

This case study is meant to challenge you to think biblically about the real struggles of life. These questions will not be answered completely in the sections below. But they do represent the kind of struggles that are

being wrestled with in Psalm 39. Use the question both to stir application and to give you new insight into the psalm.

- How would you define an “anger problem;” what level does anger have to reach to be problematic?
- What should Bill do with the fact that he is often right in his assessment of Susan and the boys?
- How should someone deal with the guilt and shame that they feel when they start to take responsibility for their anger?
- What would the next step look like for Bill?

Read Psalm 39 in your preferred Bible translation. The “rewrite” of Psalm 39 below is an attempt to capture the words that God would give Bill to pray (Romans 8:26-27). This would be something Bill would need to pray many times as he struggled to surrender his anger to the Lord.

A re-write of Psalm 39

1. I kept telling myself I'd watch what I say; that I'd try to be less gruff and intimidating. I didn't want to say hurtful thing. I was determined to think about what I said before I said it, especially when my family was doing “stupid” stuff.
2. I would do good for a while. I'd keep my mouth shut, but nothing changed and eventually it would get to me. I could only take so much. My silence only dammed up the anger; it didn't decrease it. My sense of injustice mounted.
3. I got madder and madder. I was fuming. The more I thought about it the worse it got. Finally, I just let it go. My sharp tongue knew just where to start cutting. It was like old times. My anger and me were free again.
4. God help me realize these moments are that big of a deal. I act like these small events are going to define my life. I get lost in the moment. I think one act of disrespect is larger than my relationship with my sons; one instance of having to repeat what I said is larger than my marriage. God remind me how small I really am; humble me!
5. Life is too short for this kind of foolishness on my part. My anger is more foolish than whatever “stupid” thing they did. I only get 18 years with my boys and a few decades with my wife. How do we always lose sight of what really has value in life?!
6. I don't think any of us get how transient and secondary we are. We act like we are the Real Thing and not just made in Your image. We work and work to make our name great. I was providing well but in my anger devouring those I would leave my wealth to.
7. What do I do now? I'm driving around to stall... for what? You really are my only hope. I need you. I kept thinking everyone in my house needed to listen to me, when I really needed to be listening to you.
8. My anger and the dissension it has caused in my family could destroy everything that is really important to me. Deliver me from the consequences of my sin. All my buddies told me I was right

and I shouldn't have to put up with what they were doing. Don't leave me to commiserate my broken family with them.

9. Before I would bite my tongue (thinking I was right and that the world needed to hear what I had to say). Now I am truly quiet, humbled and wanting to listen to You. Only You, Lord, could bring me to this point (my wife and kids tried hundreds of times to no avail).
10. The shame and guilt are too much. I don't think I can bear what I've done. I see myself and it makes me sick. Your hand holds the mirror to my soul and I feel weak.
11. You showed me my sin and it wasn't just my loud words, harsh tone, and physical aggression. You have revealed to me my idols (respect, being heard, organized home, success, and more) and you want to consume them. Those things replaced You in my life and You will not be replaced. Wow! I sure thought I was something.
12. Please listen as I pray. I realize now I do not deserve to be heard (what a change from when I thought everyone needed to hear what I had to say). I am broken and crying. Do not walk away from me like I would from my wife when she cried. I've got a long way to go on this journey of being a godly husband and father. Thank You, Lord, for walking with me; for letting me be Your companion... I guess that is what all of us are doing in this life.
13. Here comes the guilt and shame again. It is hard to walk with You, God, I'm used to being in charge and getting to be right. I'll have to relearn how to be happy with You at the helm and life not being about me. I am completely undone (but I think it's the best thing that's happen to me in along time.).

Passages for Further Study:

Numbers 20:1-13; Psalm 4; Proverbs 14:17,29, 15:1, 29:11,22; Matthew 5:21-26; James 1:19-20, 4:1-10.

Post Questions:

Now that you have read Psalm 39, examined how Bill might rewrite it for his situation, and studied several other passages, consider the following questions:

- How has your perspective on anger changed?
- How would your answers to the "pre-questions" be different now?
- For what "frustrating" situations do you need to re-write your own version of Psalm 39.