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Turning the Curse into a Blessing

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Turning the Curse into a Blessing

The scene is an office in a small Christian counseling center. An irate husband is justifying his intense anger by presenting a long list of serious grievances against his wife, grievances many would consider unforgivable. “If your wife had done that,” he bellows, “wouldn’t you get angry?”

The scene shifts to a house in the suburbs where a harried housewife is screaming in anger at her children. She is totally out of control. Her neighbor walks in. “Sure, I’m angry,” she cries, “but you’ll never believe what they’ve done today!”

At a downtown office, the president of a small company, a deacon and a pillar at the local church, has lost his “cool.” His competitor just stabbed him in the back, and by being less than honest, stole his best account. He is outraged. Justified anger, many would say.

But the Bible says, “Avoid the risk of retaliation.” The risk of retaliation is the pitfall of justifying an angry spirit that leads to revenge, based on the fact that you have been wronged and it is your duty to seek retribution.

The world says: “That’s your responsibility. It’s good for you emotionally.”

But the Word, as always, has a better way.

Jesus himself dealt with this issue:

You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.”

But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

(Matthew 5:38-42 NKJV)

In other words, don’t come up swinging, come up singing. Don’t come up swearing, come up sharing. Don’t get bitter, get better.

Turning the Curse into a Blessing

Is that natural? No, that is supernatural. It should be the normal thing for God's children to do.

But you say, "What if I am absolutely, positively, unjustly wronged?" Peter answered that:

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

(I Peter 2:19, 20 NIV)

The Living Bible translates it:

Praise the Lord if you are punished for doing right!

Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong; but if you do right and suffer for it, and are patient beneath the blows, God is well pleased.

If you want to make God happy, then do not retaliate when you are wronged. Do not lose your temper. Quietly take it, and trust God for the outcome. While that does not seem practical, in I Peter 2 it is given in the context of an employee responding to an unjust, overbearing boss. That is about as practical as you can get.

The natural man would respond, "You're just going to let them get by with it? I've got to teach them a lesson." No, they're not getting by with anything. They will have the best teacher in the world: Jesus.

For to this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving us an example, that you should follow in his steps:

"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth"; who, when they hurled their insults at him, did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. (I Peter 2:21-23 TLB)

He said, "Father, they are all yours. Do whatever is right; I won't threaten; I won't revile. I leave them up to you."

Does that mean God is responsible to repay the evil done to us? Paul answered that in Romans:

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

Turning the Curse into a Blessing

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." (Romans 12:16-20 NIV)

What if I am mistreated by those over me? The next verses read,

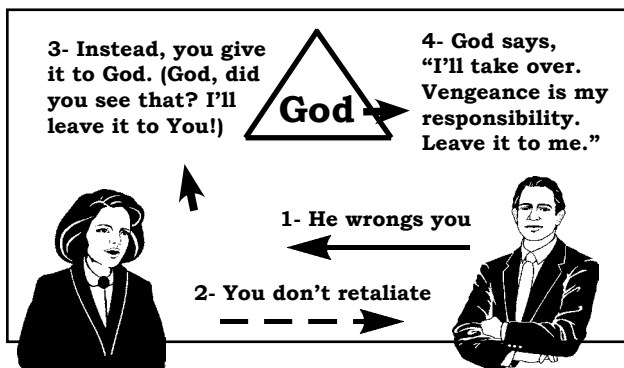
Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established of God.

Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted." (Romans 13:1, 2 NIV)

"You mean I'm not responsible to retaliate?"

Not only are you not responsible to retaliate, you are responsible not to! When you retaliate, you assume the position of God. You rob him of his rightful authority as God. You interfere with what he wants to do in that person's life and in yours. Paul said here: "Don't retaliate; revenge is God's business, not yours. He will see that the scales are balanced." (You and I would not know if they were balanced anyway...we're standing on one side of the scale!)

Ask yourself, "Doesn't that set us free?" It means anger is not an option when retaliation is an issue, even if you were right and you were wronged. With a sigh, you may be saying, "Well, that about covers it. We learn to yield our rights, empty the teakettle, relate to the sundown principle, understand the second hand of choice, and bypass the risk of retaliation—and then we ought to see the temper tamed?"



Turning the Curse into a Blessing

Well, that's a start! It is about 50 percent of the battle. But taming the temper scripturally involves more than just controlling anger.

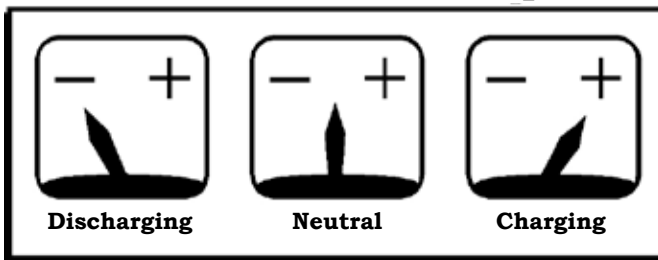
REDIRECTING ANGER INTO LOVE

Taming the temper involves redirecting the energy of anger into transforming, revolutionary spiritual power so that the curse becomes a blessing and the enemy is not only withstood but totally defeated.

An alternator on a car generates fresh power to replace the power taken from its storehouse called the battery and used by the electrical system. Unfortunately, many cars today have replaced the gauge that shows how well the electrical system is working with a little red light that usually comes on only when it is too late. There is really no way to know if your system is charging or discharging, or doing neither.

But some cars still have a gauge, and when it is working, it looks like the following diagram:

God's Alternator Principle



Let's assume the alternator is not working correctly. It is not charging. Your needle goes to discharge. This means it is drawing out energy but not replacing it. Seeing that, you turn off the lights, the air conditioner, the radio, and the windshield wipers. You turn off everything that draws power, and the needle returns to the middle. It is not charging, but it is not discharging, either. You say, "Man, that's living!"

Of course, it is raining, and you cannot see. It is hot, but you can't cool off. You want to hear the weather forecast, but you can't listen. It is getting dark and you cannot see in front of you. By stopping everything positive you are able to keep going for a while,

Turning the Curse into a Blessing

but that is definitely not the way to travel.

Likewise, many Christians today believe that if they just stop doing everything wrong, they will be “successful saints.” So they turn off the things that drain power. They give up anger, stop lying, stop stealing, stop complaining, stop worrying, stop quarreling, stop hating. They become religiously acceptable, but spiritually useless.

One noted preacher used to say that he knew a place where there were ten thousand people who did not steal, lie, cheat, lose their temper, worry, or fight. It’s called a cemetery! They do not do anything wrong because they do not do anything. They are dead.

One of the dangers of evangelical Christianity is that in an effort to scripturally “put off the old man” we get so preoccupied with not sinning, we forget the object of it all is to replace the old man with the new man, “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,” as illustrated in the following chart:

Don't do this	The Vacuum of Legalism	Do this: The Power of Transformation	The Result
Stealing	Let him that stole, steal no more (Ephesians 4:28)	Let him labor to have to give away (Ephesians 4:28)	Responsibility
Lying	Stop lying (Ephesians 4:25)	Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:25)	Honesty
Complaining	Stop complaining (Philippians 4:6,7)	Start rejoicing Live as lights (Philippians 2:15, I Thessalonians 4)	Contentment
Worrying	Be anxious for nothing (Philippians 4:6,7)	In everything by prayer and supplication (Philippians 4:6,7)	Peace
Immorality	Flee youthful lusts (II Timothy 2:22)	Follow after righteousness	Holiness

Turning the Curse into a Blessing

Don't do this	The Vacuum of Legalism	Do this: The Power of Transformation	The Result
Anger	Put away anger (Ephesians 4:31)	Be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving (Ephesians 4:32)	Fellowship

If you can stop stealing, the needle will go to neutral; but that is not living—that is legalism. The reason you stop stealing is so you can start working and begin giving acceptable gifts.

If you can stop worrying, the needle will go to neutral; but that is not living—that is legalism. The reason you stop worrying is so you can start praying, giving God the responsibility and giving God the glory. Then the peace of God that passes all understanding will keep your heart and mind settled in Christ Jesus.

If you give up your rights, empty your teakettle, surrender at sundown, monitor the second hand of choice, and even avoid the risk of retaliation but stop there, you will have opened the vault of God's riches but overlooked the treasures inside.

The reason we put away anger as described in Ephesians 4:31 is so we can take the energy of anger and redirect it into becoming kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving, as mentioned in verse 32. That's finding the treasure.

The reason we do not avenge ourselves is so we can feed our enemies (see Romans 12:19, 20). Paul said, "Be not overcome of evil," a negative or neutral command. But he went on: "Overcome evil with good," which is positive, as an alternator on full charge. We do not empty ourselves of anger and leave the teakettle empty. We refill it with the energy of love. We redirect it into power so that every excuse Satan uses to tempt us to anger now becomes an occasion to glorify God.

If you just stop being angry, Satan will keep coming until he wears you down. But if you use every test to anger as a stepping stone to glorifying God or blessing people, he will flee from you. That is the last thing Satan wants.

You are probably thinking, "It sounds good, but how does it work? Do we have a pattern to go by?" We read earlier in Matthew 5 that we are not to seek an eye for an eye. Instead, it is two miles for one, the coat-cloak combo.

Turning the Curse into a Blessing

You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

(Matthew 5:43-48)

Look at those verses carefully. Who are your enemies? Those who curse you, hate you, use you, persecute you, those whose actions or attitudes generate anger or resentment in you.

Here we have a passage that tells us how to turn anger into love.

Step One- You put on the brake, stop hating, stop resenting. We've learned that! The needle goes to neutral.

Step Two- Put your foot on the accelerator. Take the very people whose actions and attitudes generate anger in you and do four things where they are concerned (and this is a commandment, a prescription for normal Christianity).

To transform anger into power, take those who generate anger in your life and:

- (a) Love them. Love is an active, deliberate choice of the will with regard to acceptance, affections, attitudes, and actions (which is unaffected by worth or response). You choose to take a position of love where they are concerned.
- (b) Pray for them. Intercessory prayer is the act of releasing divine power on another's behalf.
- (c) Bless them. To bless means assuming a positive perspective regarding the welfare of another (the result is praise and encouragement).
- (d) Do good to them. To do good is to demonstrate actively your love through deeds.

Now let us apply that grid to the people we mentioned earlier

Turning the Curse into a Blessing

who made us so angry. First, consider the sports car driver on the freeway. He had the nerve to cut in front of you, remember? And it made you angry. Step One is to stop reacting, stop claiming your right to the highway. Keep resisting the temptation to anger as he speeds off into the sunset. Remember the second hand of choice. But if you simply resist the urge to anger, the needle on your spiritual alternator has moved to neutral and left you with a huge vacuum waiting to be filled. You can do nothing and the energy anger would have produced simply is wasted. You have controlled your anger, but nobody has been blessed by your self-control.

Now suppose instead you resist the urge to anger and begin to pray for the driver of that car. You do not know him. As we said earlier, he may be on his way to the hospital. He may be insecure and just showing off. He may be late and insensitive or selfish. You don't know. One thing is for sure, though, God knows.

So you bless him instead of cursing him; you wish him God's best. You turn your blessing into prayer. Then you slow down and let him in comfortably rather than speeding up and honking. That is doing good. What if God sent him your way to test your response and to cause you to pray for him?

Pray for his safety. (The way he drives, he needs it!) Pray for his spiritual well-being, perhaps his conversion. He may not be a Christian. God knows. You don't need to.

Two things will happen. You will be filled with peace and joy instead of anger and resentment, and Satan will be mortified. The last thing Satan wanted was for you or the other guy to be blessed and God glorified in the process. So you have drawn nigh unto God and he has drawn nigh unto you. You have resisted the devil. Now he will flee from you. In addition, the spiritual energy Satan wanted you to waste on anger has been transformed into power and peace and love.

Remember when you came home from a day of disasters expecting an early supper, but your wife was nowhere in sight? The oven was colder than the refrigerator, and there weren't even any pot pies thawing. And you got angry, remember?

But that is not God's way. First, God says, "Be sure the teakettle stays empty." So instead of harboring resentment over past offenses, at sundown every day you have been clearing the slate. Therefore, this incident is not blown out of proportion.

Turning the Curse into a Blessing

Second, you have been exercising the second hand of choice all day, so the various disasters designed to destroy you have simply caused you to pray more. You are in fellowship.

Third, you view this as a new opportunity to demonstrate love to your wife. You bless her, assume the best, never once entertain the voice of the enemy about why she is late or assume she does not care. Instead, you pray for her. You may have been so busy all day there has not been time to pray for her. So you start to pray. You praise God for her good qualities, ask his blessings on her then you set about doing good. You write a note and head for the hamburger haven up the street, or you set out the dishes in case she is stopping at the chicken place. You write her a note telling her you love her.

You take the energy that anger would have wasted and transform it into expressions of love. It will help your health, help your marriage, keep your testimony intact, and it will make Satan get on his motorbike and speed off into the sunset. Turn every opportunity for anger into love.

That is what Joseph did when he saw his brothers. The teakettle was empty, so he turned the situation into a blessing. “You meant evil,” he said, “but God meant it for good.” That is what Stephen did as they stoned him to death. He blessed those who were stoning him. He prayed for them, “Father lay not this sin to their charge.” That is what Paul and Silas did in prison. Anger? Not on your life. No—joy! The result? Even the jailer’s salvation.

That is what Jesus did as he hung on the cross. Bitter? Never. Vindictive? Not on your life. First he saw that his mother would be cared for. Then he prayed for those who were murdering him. That is what Moses did when Aaron and Miriam started a revolt against his authority and God’s anger was stirred. Moses prayed for them and blessed them, and God’s anger was stayed.

God’s greats in Scripture were at their best when they not only resisted Satan when tempted to unrighteous anger, but used the very circumstances Satan intended for evil as a chance to bless others, even their enemies. And as always, God was glorified, they were blessed, and Satan fled.

Don’t you see? Not only can we put away ungodly anger, but every occasion to anger can now become a stepping stone to demonstrating love, to deepening prayer, to ministering to others.

Turning the Curse into a Blessing

Remember the woman in front of you in the checkout line? The clerk in the stereo shop? Your co-worker whom you accused of stealing your fountain pen? The report card encounter you turned into a nightmare? Each could have become a spiritual blessing. It all depends on what we do when the tests of life loom on the horizon, and the voice of the enemy whispers, "You've got your rights. There she goes again; what nerve she's got."

God is calling us to resist the devil, to choose not to get angry, and then to go on the offensive. Let that incident become a springboard to loving, blessing, praying, and doing good until a confused and discouraged Satan flees from you. Then the blessings will abound as you transform the energy of anger into love.

Turn the Curse into a Blessing

God turned the curse into a blessing
For Joseph and his kin.
Satan's goal was bitterness,
Anger turned to sin.

But Joseph had the mind of God,
He knew the Master would
Take the devil's evil curse
And turn it into good.

God once again at Calvary
In history's darkest hour
Turned Satan's tool a Roman cross,
Into redeeming power.

Stephen gazed at heaven's light
And filled with joy, he cried,
"Lay not this sin to their charge, Lord."
Then filled with love, he died.

These all knew the secret
Even as life grew dim
No need for boiling anger;
Vengeance belongs to him!

Instead, they chose to bless and love;
Instead, they chose to pray.
The curse turned into blessing;
The night turned into day.

(continued)

Turning the Curse into a Blessing

You, too, can see it happen;
You can God's power employ;
For the curses turn to blessings
When you turn anger into joy!

PROJECT TO PERFORM

Using Matthew 5:43-48, list four things you should do for people who provoke you to anger. Take one such person who has angered you, and practically design a plan for obeying this principle.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- 1- Find two characters in Scripture who went beyond "putting away anger" and turned anger into love.
- 2- Write a one-page summary of how this study on anger should affect your Christian life.

FOCUS ON APPLICATION

- 1- List the six things found in Ephesians 4:31 that we are to "put away."
- 2- List the alternatives to anger found in Ephesians 4:32.
- 3- Paraphrase (put in your own words) one of the following passages: Matthew 5:38-42; I Peter 2:19, 20; or Romans 12:6-21. Using modern-day illustrations, summarize (in one sentence) a proper response to instances that seem to justify anger and retaliation.

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