

THE HEADWATERS OF ANGER

By Max Lucado

“The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. So Cain became very *angry* and felt *rejected*” (Gen. 4:4-5 emphasis mine).

Interesting. This is the first appearance of anger in the Bible. He’ll pop up some four hundred more times between here and the maps in the back, but this is the first occasion. He pulls up to the curb and gets out of the car, and look who is in the front seat with him—Rejection. Anger and Rejection in the same sentence.

This isn’t the only time the couple is spotted in Scripture. Anger sings many pages. And more than once Rejection is charged with arson.

The sons of Jacob were rejected by their father. He pampered Joseph and neglected them. The result? The brothers were angry. “Joseph’s brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms” (Gen. 37:4 NASB).

Saul was rejected by his people. In choosing heroes, they chose the fair-haired David over the appointed king. The result? Saul was ticked off. “The women sang as they played, and said, ‘Saul has slain his thousand, and David his ten thousands.’ Then Saul became very angry” (1 Sam. 18:7-8 NASB).

David’s work was rejected by God. His plan to move the ark of the covenant by cart didn’t please the Father. And when Uzzah touched what he shouldn’t have touched, “God smote him . . . and he died” (2 Sam. 6:7 RSV). Before David was afraid, he fumed. “David became angry because of the Lord’s outburst against Uzzah” (2 Sam. 6:8 NASB).

And Jonah. The fellow had a whale of a problem with anger. (Sorry, couldn’t resist.) He didn’t feel the Ninevites were worthy of mercy, but God did. By forgiving them, God rejected Jonah’s opinion. And how did the rejection make Jonah feel? “It greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry” (Jon. 4:1 NASB).

I don’t want to oversimplify a complex emotion. Anger has many causes: impatience, unmet expectations, stress, referees who couldn’t see a pass-interference call if you painted it on their garage door—oops, sorry, a flashback to a high-school football game. The fire of anger has many logs, but according to biblical accounts, the thickest and the hottest block of wood is rejection.

If rejection causes anger, wouldn't acceptance cure it?

If rejection by heaven makes you mad at others, wouldn't acceptance from heaven stir your love for them? This is the 7:47 Principle. Remember the verse? "He who is forgiven little loves little." (Lk. 7:47). We can replace the word *forgiven* with *accepted* and maintain the integrity of the passage. "He who is *accepted* little loves little." If we think God is harsh and unfair, guess how we'll treat people. Harshly and unfairly. But if we discover that God has doused us with unconditional love, would that make a difference?

We could learn a lesson from T.D. Terry. Many years ago a stressful job stirred daily bouts of anger within him. His daughter, upon hearing him describe them years later, responded with surprise. "I don't remember any anger during those years."

He asked if she remembered the tree—the one near the driveway about halfway between the gate and the house. "Remember how it used to be tall? Then lost a few limbs? And after some time was nothing more than a stump?"

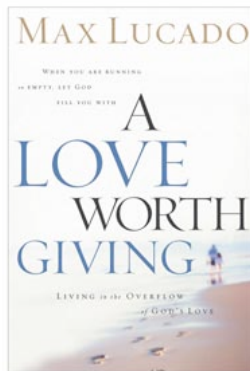
She did.

"That was me," T.D. explained. "I took my anger out on the tree. I kicked it. I took an ax to it. I tore the limbs. I didn't want to come home mad, so I left my anger at the tree."

Let's do the same. In fact, let's go a step farther. Rather than take out our anger on a tree in the yard, let's take our anger to the tree on the hill. Leave your anger at the tree of Calvary. When others reject you, let God accept you. He sings over you. Take a long drink from his limitless love, and cool down.

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Genesis 4:4-5

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