

"Don't Add Fuel to the Fire"

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Theme: Choose to respond rather than react in the face of anger.

Text: Proverbs 15:1

Here's a thought: Laurence J. Peter warned, "Speak when you are angry - and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret."

Watch "How to Deal with Road Rage | Anger Management On the Go" at www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9CONciCLD4.

Now *there's* a creative way to deal with road rage!

King Solomon was obviously a keen observer of people and relationships when he writes in Proverbs 15:1, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." NIV

When the fire of anger is burning you can:

Douse it

or

Stir it

When the fire of anger is burning you can:

Douse it



A gentle, soft or tender answer turns away wrath. In the face of such an answer anger turns back and retreats.

There *are* times to be assertive and to stand up for what is just and right. More often than we want to admit, however, we are called to live out mercy. Jesus taught in Matthew 5:38-39:

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. NIV

The next time someone is upset with you try this: rather than going toe-to-toe physically or verbally, take a deep breath and reply to them calmly and gently. A calm response comes from a calm mind and a calm heart. In order to calm down you might need to go for a walk or go for a drive.

French writer Joseph Joubert (1754-1824) advised, "The best remedy for a short temper is a long walk."

The upside is you might get some much needed exercise or see some of the countryside that you hadn't seen before. ☺ The Apostle Paul directs us not to let the sun go down while we are still angry (Ephesians 4:26), but I have learned this underlines a commitment to work things out promptly more than advice to stay up late arguing. It is surprising how much a good night's sleep can change my attitude and perspective!

With such fair skin and now with a bald head, I have had my share of sunburns over the years. One of the last things I want to do when I have a sunburn is to have a hot shower or jump into a hot tub. If you choose to treat any kind of burn at home, place a cool compress over it to relieve the pain and swelling. You may do this for five to 15 minutes and then remove the compress. Avoid using ice or extremely cold compresses because they can aggravate the burn (www.healthline.com/health/first-degree-burn#Treatments4). Likewise, in relationships you don't want to be as cold as ice – uncaring and disinterested – because you can aggravate the angry person even more. However, like a cool compress on a burn, a gentle answer can draw the heat out of a volatile situation.

Consider how Jesus responds in the midst of anger in Luke 22:49-51:

49 When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" 50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. 51 But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him. NIV

John 18:10 tells us it was Peter, who was known to act before thinking. Matthew 26:52-54 adds:

52 "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on

my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" NIV

Jesus demonstrates great security in who He is and in the heavenly resources He has available to Him. As a result of this security He remains calm while we would have felt threatened. From this security flowed remarkable self-control, empowering Him to respond to aggression with compassion.



Smokeybear.com provides these tips for “Extinguishing Your Campfire” (<https://smokeybear.com/en/prevention-how-tos/campfire-safety/how-to-maintain-and-extinguish-your-campfire>):

- Allow the wood to burn completely to ash, if possible.
- Pour lots of water on the fire. Drown ALL embers, not just the red ones.
- Pour until hissing sound stops.
- If you do not have water, stir dirt or sand into the embers with a shovel to bury the fire.
- With your shovel, scrape any remaining sticks and logs to remove any embers. Make sure that no embers are exposed and still smoldering.
- Continue adding water, dirt or sand and stirring with a shovel until all material is cool.

I wonder if we could adapt these tips for “Extinguishing Your Interpersonal Campfire”:

- Allow the one who is upset with you to burn completely to ash while you refuse to add fuel by becoming defensive.
- Pour lots of water on the fire by taking responsibility for what you have said and done. Drown ALL embers, not just the red ones, by truly seeking to listen and understand.
- Pour until hissing sound stops. Most conflicts will subside if only one person is venting.
- If you do not have water, stir dirt or sand into the embers with a shovel to bury the fire. Choose responses that will extinguish rather than fan the fire of anger.
- With your shovel, scrape any remaining sticks and logs to remove any embers. Make sure that no embers are exposed and still smoldering.

Search out the cause of the anger by asking questions. Often the issue is not *really* the issue.

- Continue adding water, dirt or sand and stirring with a shovel until all material is cool. Your listening ears and calm words go a long way toward cooling the anger in those around you.

Rather than “fighting fire with fire” will you choose to “fight fire with water”? Will you ask the Lord to use you to turn away wrath with gentle answers?

When the fire of anger is burning you can:

Douse it

or

Stir it



A harsh word stirs up anger. If you have sat around a campfire lately you have noticed that if the fire is allowed to burn long enough it will eventually go out. However, if the chill of the night air becomes too much you need to get up, find a long stick, stir up the wood and ashes then add another log.

It seems that Nabal, whose name means “foolish, senseless or wicked”, had a knack for stirring up anger. One recorded example is found in 1 Samuel 25:4-13:

4 While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. 5 So he sent ten young men and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. 6 Say to him: 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours! 7 "Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. 8 Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.'" 9 When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited. 10 Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. 11 Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows

where?" 12 David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. 13 David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies. NIV

In contrast, Nabal's wife Abigail spoke kindly to David and his men and offered them abundant food and drink. If she had not acted quickly in her peacemaking efforts their entire family would have been wiped out.

If you assume the motives of others or come across as condescending you will certainly add fuel to the fire. If you try to touch an angry person you will probably prompt their blood pressure to increase even further. If being right is more important to you than the relationship you will find the room to be hot in the short-term then quite chilly in the long-term.

It is possible to be completely right in the content of what you say but completely wrong in the method or timing of your delivery. A truthful but insensitive response can generate more heat than light when tensions arise.

Canadian writer Laurence J. Peter (1919-1990) was probably speaking from experience when he warned, "Speak when you are angry - and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret."

Don't try this at home, but sometimes around the farm we would pour some gas on a pile of wood or garbage that we wanted to burn quickly and completely. It is amazing how well even damp wood and soggy garbage will burn when doused in gasoline.

Forbes provides 7 Steps for Dealing with Angry Customers (www.forbes.com/sites/thesba/2013/08/02/7-steps-for-dealing-with-angry-customers/#53d809a228ad), coping with a tense situation and hopefully resolving it to everyone's satisfaction:

1. Remain calm.
2. Don't take it personally.
3. Use your best listening skills.
4. Actively sympathize.
5. Apologize gracefully.
6. Find a solution.
7. Take a few minutes on your own.

I am learning that being well-rested is essential to handling conflict. I was a Christian Education Pastor in the early 1990s and looked after several children's programs. After a long day and frustrating evening dealing with disciplinary and staffing issues a mother came to me with a complaint.

Unfortunately, I did not respond well and the situation became larger than it needed to be.

There was a guy telling his friend that he and his wife had a serious argument the night before. “But it ended,” he said, “When she came crawling to me on her hands and knees.”

“What did she say?” asked the friend.

The husband replied, “She said, ‘Come out from under that bed, you coward!’”



Hatfield clan

The first shot fired in the Hatfield & McCoy story was the murder of Asa Harmon McCoy, but there were other factors that added to the conflict. Over an eleven-year period from 1880 to 1891, nearly two dozen people were killed combined from both families. This hostility went on needlessly for years because each side refused to turn away wrath with a gentle answer. The violence earned the Hatfields and McCoys legendary status as America’s go-to feud, something that has continued to this day.

Even though the families announced a truce in 1891, they didn’t shake hands on it until 1976. Over time, the two families continued to feud over land rights, including a 2000 legal battle over ownership of a cemetery. Finally, in 2003, in a public appearance on CBS’s Saturday Early Show, descendants from the families drew up a contract and signed it live on television. They wanted to show, after 9/11, “that if the most deep-seeded family feud can be mended, so can the nation unite to protect its freedom.” (From www.todayfoundout.com/index.php/2014/12/true-story-real-feud-hatfields-mccoys/)

Will you commit to bringing calm and peace into a world filled with rage?

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