

Review of *Good and Angry*

By David Powlison

ETHAN POWERS

Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness, by David Powlison. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016. 256pp., \$21.99.

Many words seem to conflict with one another. “Good” and “Angry” may seem like two of those words. Is “good anger” an oxymoron, or does it have a biblical basis? In his book, *Good & Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness*, David Powlison explains that good anger does exist.¹ He demonstrates that it is the type of anger exhibited by the Lord Jesus that we are called to imitate. David Powlison (1949–2019) was one of the founders of the modern biblical counseling movement and served as a biblical counselor for over thirty years. In addition to authoring many influential counseling books and articles, he was the Executive Director of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF) and the editor of the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*. However, Powlison viewed himself primarily as a sinner who had received the grace and redemption of Christ. It is from this perspective that he was able to graciously write to fellow sinners in need of a Savior.

¹ David Powlison, *Good & Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016).

In many ways, Powlison is the friend all Christians need: one who sets the Word of God before them and doesn't let them off the hook when it comes to sin. Very few authors of counseling books can claim all people will struggle with their topic, but that's exactly what Powlison does with anger. Understanding that it is a common struggle, he encourages his audience to read with a pen and highlighter in hand, think critically about the text, and apply it to their lives. Powlison speaks of anger as a neutral human capacity and helpfully delineates between "anger done right" and "anger done wrong." He does this in a way that encourages his readers to imitate a God who always acts rightly. This is what he calls "the constructive displeasure of mercy." All of these features and more make this book a great benefit to the biblical counseling movement and the local church.

SUMMARY

The book is divided into four main sections. First, Powlison helps readers consider their personal experience with anger. He argues that all people are angry people and categorizes these experiences into three generalized types: the "Gunslinger," the "Volcano," and the "Iceberg." Even before reading the book, each reader will likely recognize which category best characterizes him.

The second and most extensive section delves into the nature of anger. Powlison discusses the inner workings of the human heart that produce sinful anger. He then describes how that sinful anger can be transformed into a constructive display of mercy, imitating God's perfect way. This phrase, "constructive display of mercy," refers to the act of introducing good into bad situations. There is real evil in the world that demands a response. The righteous response is to mercifully engage in the situation and seek to resolve the issue. "Mercy includes a component of forceful anger, but anger's typical hostility, vindictiveness, and destructiveness do not dominate" (74). In practice, this perspective completely reorients the Christian's understanding of anger.

Section three offers hope to believers who recognize anger in their own lives. It is possible to transform destructive anger into something constructive. How? God uses His Word to reveal the true nature of anger and graciously

provides the way of escape. He is faithful to use His living and active Word to transform the life of the sinner. Powlison provides eight diagnostic questions as a tool to exhort the struggling believer toward righteousness. He is not concerned with mere behavior modification. Rather, Powlison aims to promote genuine heart change that is motivated by a proper understanding of theology and the God it reveals. This encourages readers to rightly understand their anger as they hope for change.

Powlison titles the fourth section “Tackling the Hard Cases.” While that may sound intimidating, he breaks it down simply. Powlison offers insight into both extreme circumstances and common experiences that evoke anger in a counselee. He also discusses anger at oneself and anger at God. Powlison relieves the burden on the counselor by using Scripture to inform these difficult cases.

EVALUATION

Powlison humbles his readers without humiliating them. He does not place himself on a pedestal, nor does he think anyone is worthy of such a place. This is especially helpful for both new and experienced counselors who may be reading the book to find a resource for counseling sessions. These counselors will be confronted with the reality of their own anger, which will better equip them to help others.

The theology of God’s wrath is effectively applied in an area that is not commonly addressed. God’s wrath is often spoken of as something Christians should rightly fear, but it is rarely discussed as something to be righteously emulated. Powlison makes it clear that Christians are to hate what God hates and love what God loves. Anger is often understood only in a negative sense, but that view is too one-dimensional. It ignores the fact that Christians worship a God who saves them from His own righteous wrath. Powlison avoids making this mistake.

This book is not ideal for a counselee caught in life-dominating sin. While the content is exactly what a struggling Christian needs to hear, the form of the book may prove overwhelming and burdensome. In other words, a person

treading in turbulent waters doesn't need a heavy book to weigh him down. Another counseling resource may be more helpful to a counselee dominated by anger.²

One helpful feature of this book is Powlison's ability to create resources for counselors. He does this in two obvious ways. First, he lists two to five application questions at the end of each chapter. Second, chapter thirteen consists of eight questions to diagnose sinful anger and encourage holiness. These resources can help a counselor structure counseling sessions and create homework assignments for counselees. It also helps counselors organize book clubs and personal discipleship gatherings. Powlison has a clear concern for the practical application of his book, and he gives counselors a strong starting point for their ministries.

CONCLUSION

Good & Angry is an excellent resource for pastors, counselors, or believers who want to deepen their understanding of biblical anger or seek help in overcoming their struggles. David Powlison's extensive counseling experience enabled him to write a theologically astute and practical book on anger that not only addresses the issue biblically but also offers hope for transformation. He conveys biblical truth graciously and wisely. It would be an excellent book for a group of believers to read together or for two friends to read slowly over coffee. Books on anger will continue to be written as long as the Lord tarries, but *Good & Angry* contains insights on anger that make it a valuable addition to the counselor's library.

Ethan Powers serves as a deacon at Kenwood Baptist Church. He holds a B.S. in Biblical Counseling from Boyce College and an Advanced Master of Divinity from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Ethan is currently working toward certification with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. He lives in Louisville with his wife and son.

² For instance, see Robert D. Jones, *Anger: Calming Your Heart* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), 2019.