I grew up in a middle-class home with parents who loved me. And yet I had a father with a lot of unresolved anger. I never quite knew when he was going to blow or what might set him off. It could be anything from a teenager driving too fast up our street to the television being too loud for him to fall asleep at night. But whatever it was, when it happened, things would get loud and expletives would fly. These outbursts of anger created a lot of different emotions for me as a child, everything from fear, to embarrassment, to making me angry over his anger. On another occasion when I was about eleven years old, he and I were in the car going somewhere. As we approached a stop sign, he was not paying attention and rear-ended the car stopped in front of us. Immediately he turned and began to yell at me for not warning him of the stopped car. Something had obviously happened in my father’s life, long before he got in the car that day. I don’t mean minutes or hours before—I mean years before. Some injustice in his life that was totally unrelated to that fender bender. Some hurt or offense that was never resolved so it left him responding to every felt injustice with anger. After a while anger became so much a part of his life that he didn’t even notice the damage it was doing to those he loved the most. Now fortunately this story ends on a much happier note. In my teenage years my dad discovered a relationship with Jesus Christ, which completely changed his life. From that moment on, he went out of his way to make sure I knew he was proud of me and that he loved me. Not only did God become the most important thing in his life but serving God became a priority for him. Now I’m not telling you that he never became angry again, because like all of us, there were things that upset him. But I do believe my father broke the habit of responding to every difficult thing in his life with anger. We are in a series called… Creatures of Habit. There are areas of our life that we have repeated for so long they have become bad habits. And if we don’t deal with things, not only will they keep us from God’s best, but they will become a part of our identity. In other words, we will become known for our bad habits. Listen once you invite Christ into your life, he breaks the hold sin has on you and you now have the power to say no to sin. And of course, the point of the Christian life is to become more like Jesus, to take on his nature or character. But what often happens is because of apathy or laziness or whatever we continue with the same old habits. And if we continue to practice those long enough, they can become an addiction or a spiritual stronghold. On the other hand, if you want to get rid of a bad habit you have to be intentional about it, you didn’t get this habit overnight and you won’t get rid of it overnight. And one of the best ways to get rid of a bad habit is to replace it with a good habit, and once you do that you will begin to see the fruit of the spirit grow in your life. And the fruit of the spirit is actually the evidence of your spiritual growth. All 12 of these topics in the book are ones that I’ve struggled with to one degree or another. And in each chapter, I give you some steps you can take to break this habit. So you might want to refer back again and again to the chapter you are struggling with. For instance Steve Arterburn says in his forward the chapter on cynicism is worth the price of the book. It’s also important to understand, that you can’t break these habits on your own, you need God’s help. Gal. 5:16NLT. Now I think it’s important to mention that anger is not always a bad thing. In fact, anger is a God-given emotion, and it’s designed to help us deal with any threat that might come into our life. You see anger is not the problem, it’s when you lose control of your words or your actions. For instance, we know that Jesus got angry on several occasions. One example is when merchants were turning religion into a moneymaking scam. Jesus confronted them and ran them out of the temple. I believe there are a number of things that make Jesus angry. Any kind of injustice angers God, I think it angers God to see an adult harm a child, or to see someone break their marriage vow and commit adultery. And yet even though Jesus got angry, the scripture clearly tells us that he never sinned. So, the type of anger that Jesus demonstrated was more of a righteous indignation. He got angry at those who acted contrary to God’s standard of fairness, justice, and goodness. This anger is more directed at the *wrong* that was done, and not so much toward the *person* involved. In fact, anger has produced great movements, such as MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Their anger over the loss of their children motivated them to do something about it by starting one of the largest victim advocate groups in America. But on the other hand, anger is an emotion many of us experience when things in our world are not going the way we want them to. Maybe you have been working towards a promotion, but it goes to someone else. Or you tell your kids to clean their room, but they ignore you. If anger becomes your immediate response every time you don’t like something; then you have established a habit. And it has the potential to hurt your health, wreck your peace of mind, destroy your relationships, and even threaten your career. I once heard psychologist and author Dr. Richard Dobbins speak to a group of men at a conference. He said men typically have three issues they struggle with in life: 1. Sexual issues, 2. Anger issues, and 3. They lie about the first two. Anger has become a public epidemic in America. You can see the signs of our nation’s irritability everywhere you go. The polarization of our political system, the everyday nastiness of the online world, the workplace or school shootings. It’s so bad that we’re afraid to lock eyes with anyone in fear they might lose their cool and pull out a gun. It’s an angry world that we are living in. And yet most violence in America is not random. The American SPCC says that over 4.1 million child abuse cases are reported annually. Many of those by an angry, out-of-control parent. Friends no one is born with these anger issues, it’s learned behavior. Which is why if you’re a parent, you need to control your anger in front of your kids. Psychologists have called our generation “the age of rage.” It’s become so common we have created our own “rage” vocabulary. For instance, “road rage” is a term I know you’ve heard, or possibly even experienced. Or maybe you have experienced “check-out rage” while waiting in a long line at a retail store. Or “phone rage,” where you get extremely angry while on the phone because you’re unhappy with a product or service. You can also see it in recreational activities such as “golf rage.” Several years ago, I was playing golf with a friend who got so upset over how bad he was playing that he threw his golf club into the pond. Later, once he cooled down, he went back and waded into the murky pond to retrieve his club. Proverbs 14:29NLT. Some of you might argue that you can’t control your anger. And I would simply push back and say while you might not be able to control your situation, or how it makes you feel, you certainly can control how you express anger. It reminds me of the actor who was playing the part of Christ in an outdoor Passion play. As he carried the cross up the hill, a tourist began to heckle him, make fun of him, and shout insults at him. Finally, the actor had taken all he could take. He put down his cross, walked over to the tourist, and punched him in the face. After the play was over, the director told him, “I know he was a pest, but I can’t condone what you did. I mean you are playing the part of Jesus, and Jesus would have never retaliated. So, don’t do that again.” The actor promised to control his temper. But sure enough, the same heckler was back again the following day for the next performance. The actor tried to ignore him, but his anger got the best of him, and, again, he put down the cross and punched the guy in the nose. The director said, “That’s it. We cannot have you behaving this way while playing the part of Jesus.” The actor begged, “Please just give me one more chance. I need this job, and I can handle it if it happens again.” The director decided to give him one more chance. The next day the actor was carrying his cross up the road again. And sure enough, that same heckler was back. The actor was really trying to control himself. He was clinching his fists and grinding his teeth. Finally, still carrying the cross, he pointed his finger towards the heckler and said, “I’ll meet you after the resurrection!” When we don’t control our anger, we don’t seem much like Jesus. One pastor said we often act like a skunk; we spray our stinking temper on anyone who gets in our way. Some of us use anger to motivate people to action. You yell at your kids to motivate their behavior. You yell at a salesclerk to motivate her to help you. You yell at your employees to make them work harder. And you know what it works! At least in the short term. You can scare people into doing almost anything. But in the long run, you will always lose, because anger always alienates people. Think about it: when people are angry and shouting at you, does that draw you closer to them or push you away from them? If you are a parent and you are using anger to motivate your kids, you are actually pushing them away. When your kids are young, they think you’re a superhero. Everyone else might think you are quirky or odd, but not your kids—they think you can do no wrong. Their spirits are wide open to you, but if you continue to show anger towards them, it will close their spirit. Paul recognized this danger when he warned, Ephesians 6:4NLT. If you do struggle with anger you may feel like there’s nothing you can do about it. But friends you have more control over your anger than you think. You *can* learn to express your emotions without losing control. If you don’t think you can then get professional help from a Christian counselor who has experience working with anger issues. Because, if you don’t, you will hurt the people you love the most. We often want to excuse our behavior by blaming others for our anger. “It’s those kids of mine.” “My coworkers who make me so mad.” “If she wouldn’t have said that, I wouldn’t have lost my temper.” But if you are serious about breaking this habit of anger you have to take responsibility. Let me give you some steps you can take to break this habit. **#1** Identify the source of your anger. If you are in the habit of losing control over every perceived injustice in your life, then you need to figure out what’s really behind your anger. Because anger is rarely the primary problem. In other words, it’s usually the result of a much deeper problem such as pride, or hurt, or insecurity, or embarrassment. But once I understand what’s behind my anger, I’m more likely to be able to resolve it. For instance, when someone criticizes me why do I become so angry or defensive? Possibly because of my insecurity or not feeling like I measure up. Physical or emotional pain can also cause anger. When I was younger, I had a lot of unexplained joint pain. I found that when I hurt I was more impatient and quick to lose my temper. Or maybe someone deeply hurt my feelings or broke my heart or unhealthy relationships are all common causes for anger. I’m just saying if you can identify the source of your anger, you are more likely to understand how to deal with it. **#2** Learn to calm down before you react. When you start to feel those emotions of anger starting to rise up, take a few minutes to step away and collect your thoughts. Self-talk can be very effective, is it really worth getting this upset over… Will my anger really solve anything? Prov. 29:11NIV. In other words, think before you speak. Put your mind in gear before you put your mouth in motion. I once heard someone say, I’ve never regretted silence, but I’ve often regretted what I spoke. James 1:19NLT. **#3** Get some exercise. It helps to take a walk, go to the gym, whatever you need to do reduce your anger and stress level. Exercise will also help increase the release of endorphins in your body which will help you reduce your level of stress. **#4** Let go of my anger correctly. There’s a lot that could be said about this but just decide you are not going to handle your anger in inappropriate ways. For instance, don’t repress your anger. Because your anger will always find a way to be expressed. Don’t use Sarcasm, some of you think you’re pretty witty with your sarcasm but it’s actually coming from repressed anger. Others of you try to manipulate to get your own way. Others of you have a vindictive spirit, “I don’t get mad I just get even.” Listen whether you complain, blame, or criticize, your anger will always find a way of release. People that are often critical are often people that are simply trying to repress their anger. There’s another word for repressed anger, and that would be depression. Depression is frozen rage or repressed anger. On the flip side you can’t just express your anger. This is often seen in violent reactions or verbal abuse, and you leave burn marks on everyone in your path. Basically I’m just saying it’s time to grow up guys! **#5** Practice forgiveness. Jesus was unjustly beaten and mocked. They placed a crown of thorns on his head, and they nailed his hands and feet to a wooden cross. If anyone had the right to be angry, it was Jesus. And yet do you remember what he said? “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing”. If you really want to get rid of your anger, you must choose to forgive the person who has done you wrong. I’ve heard it said that holding onto unforgiveness is like drinking rat poison, hoping the rat will die. Colossians 3:13NLT. Lewis Smedes once said, “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.” And yet forgiveness is a process. It takes time to let it go, to lay it down. But you can forgive that one who angered you. **#6** Give your anger an expiration date. Eph 4:26 NLT. Paul says don’t let a day pass without resolving your anger. When you allow angry emotions to accumulate over time, like a pressure cooker they will eventually explode in destructive and inappropriate ways that will only hurt people and leave you with regrets. And **#7** Rely on God’s control. If you really believe that God has a plan for your life you will experience contentment and peace rather than anger when things don’t go your way. You didn’t get that promotion, so you want to get angry. But then you realize, God has a plan for my life. I may not fully understand what he’s doing, but I trust him, so there’s no reason to get upset. Anger is not something you can prevent, but as long as you keep it under control, you will have more peace and healthier relationships. I’m going to ask everyone to bow your heads just for a moment. With every head bowed how many of you would raise a hand and say Steve would you pray for me. Anger is a habit I need to break in my life.