

**30 DAYS TO**  
*Taming*  
**YOUR**  
*Anger*

Deborah Smith Pegues



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### **30 DAYS TO TAMING YOUR ANGER**

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*This book is dedicated to my mother,  
Doris Lavon Smith,  
who transitioned to her heavenly home on  
May 23, 2012.  
Her unconditional love, support, and faith in the power of God  
inspired me to reach for the stars.*

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## Prologue

### It's a Mad, Mad World

It was Friday afternoon around 3:00 p.m. when I joined the slowing traffic on the Interstate 10 freeway heading for the Los Angeles garment district. I needed to pick up some special buttons to update an outfit I had planned to wear over the weekend. Of course, I should have made the trip earlier in the day, but I had gotten sidetracked responding to emails. Without the heavy traffic, this little excursion usually took less than an hour round-trip.

Within minutes of getting on the freeway, I looked into my rearview mirror and discovered a huge sports utility vehicle just inches from my bumper. I concluded that the tailgater was trying to intimidate me into going faster. I immediately felt *irritated*. He was violating my highway boundaries. I thought, *I should teach him a lesson and drive even slower. Can't he see it's impossible and unsafe to go any faster in this traffic?*

As I contemplated whether to retaliate or to ignore the bully, traffic came to almost a complete stop. No way was my plan of running into my favorite wholesale fabric store, grabbing the buttons, and getting back home

by 4:00 p.m. going to work today. I felt extremely *frustrated* with the snail-like pace.

After what seemed an eternity, traffic finally started to inch along again. I decided it was best to exit the freeway and take the surface streets the rest of the way. As I guided my car toward the exit lane, a car came speeding down the shoulder and barely missed me. It scared the daylights out of me. I was *infuriated*! The driver could have killed me. I fantasized about what it would be like to shoot out the windows in his car with a nonlethal weapon specifically designed to punish reckless drivers. In that moment, I understood why some people succumb to road rage.

From the time Cain killed his brother Abel to the 2011 Arab Spring uprising against oppressive government regimes in the Middle East, anger has been one of the primary motivators of negative human behavior. Notwithstanding, even God can be provoked to anger. In fact, there are more references in the Bible to God's anger than to man's. However, God's anger was always in response to man's violation of His covenants or commands.

I am well acquainted with this powerful emotion of anger. I grew up in a household where angry displays occurred as frequently as trips to the market. My dad was a good provider who exercised great financial discipline, but he had a volatile temper. With seven children in the home—including six rambunctious boys and a wife who never quite embraced the idea of a household budget—there was no shortage of behaviors to set him



off. Domestic abuse and corporal punishment were the norm. Even when everyone behaved, Dad still always seemed to be angry. At his core, he loved God. He was a faithful deacon, Sunday school superintendent, and a trustworthy church treasurer; nevertheless, his anger would get the best of him. And, like most parents, he passed his legacy of mismanaged anger along to his children.

I used to think that I escaped unscathed as everyone viewed me as the levelheaded one in the family. I refused to succumb to angry outbursts or violence. To this day I cannot recall ever having engaged in a loud argument or having a physical altercation with anyone in my entire life! However, through good mentoring, prayer, studying the Bible, and much self-examination, I learned that I too was mismanaging my anger. I often expressed it by calmly delivering syrupy sarcasm designed to demean my opponent, by cutting offenders out of my life completely, and by finding refuge in food.

We are all so diverse in our perceptions of and responses to anger-triggering events. Most of us struggle with navigating that great chasm between the apostle Paul's two-part admonition, "Be angry" and "do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26). It's time to take control of this powerful emotion and stop letting it control us.

Be forewarned, this book is unapologetically biblical in its approach to dealing with this complex emotion. I say "complex" because even as I ponder my previously mentioned freeway experience, I realize that within moments, I had experienced three degrees of anger:

*irritation, frustration, and infuriation.* Each of these feelings of displeasure has a different depth and duration. My desire is to show you practical ways to minimize and triumph over these emotions. Of course, no discussion of anger would be complete without addressing *indignation*, the good, righteous anger against injustice—anger with a cause. Anger that can often get out of control if our zeal is not restrained.

Since most of the triggers that provoke us to anger are initiated by others, the majority of the book will address such behavior. I will help you to identify your triggers and explore ways to deal with the underlying “pre-anger” or primary emotions that are often at the root of our displeasure.

Finally, I will explain how to triumph over certain external contributors to this *God-given* emotion of protest. Yes, anger is a protest against a real or perceived violation of our principles, our peace, our possessions, our preferences, our plans, our physical well-being, or our personal relationships.

# *Part 1*

## Understand the Nature of the Beast



Day 1

## Irritation: Master Your Triggers

*Irritation: a temporary annoyance  
that rouses mild displeasure*

I try to answer my office phone personally whenever possible. It is my attempt to counter the influence of impersonal communication that is the norm today. It irritates me, however, when callers, having learned that they've reached me instead of my assistant, proceed to tell me their entire life story in long-drawn-out details. Even after I pray with them and encourage them, I fight the temptation to become irritated.

Irritation is the mildest form of anger and has the shortest duration. Irritation is inescapable in everyday life. I'm sure you could produce a list of behaviors that regularly irritate or annoy you. Perhaps you can relate to some common triggers others have expressed:

“Inconsiderate mobile phone users”

“Rude or uncaring customer service”

“Drivers who ride your bumper”

“People who move too slowly”

“Folks who violate my personal space”

“Parents who ignore their children’s annoying behavior in public”

“People who drop by without calling first”

“An invited guest who brings an *uninvited* guest to my sit-down dinner party”

“People who engage in ‘sidebar’ conversations while someone else has the floor”

“Shoppers with twenty items who get in the ten-items-or-less line—in front of me”

“People who address me as ‘honey,’ ‘sweetheart,’ or any other term of endearment”

“Street beggars who are mean or ungrateful”

These short-term displeasures not only provoke our impatience but can also threaten our peace if we let them. If you live on Planet Earth, where people don’t always behave as they should, you would do well to develop some good coping strategies. Otherwise, mismanaged irritations can quickly turn into full-blown anger with destructive consequences.

Although some behaviors can be confronted in an assertive, God-honoring way (like the time a fellow college student looked at me imploringly and stated that my gum chewing was driving her crazy), many irritations leave us with few options beyond accepting or ignoring them. King Solomon admonished, “A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense” (Proverbs 19:11 NIV). And, yes, I know it takes special grace to overlook things that get under our skin—but the secret is to embrace the grace God gives for every situation.

Grace is God's empowering ability to do through us what we cannot do in our own strength. Every Spirit-filled person bears the seeds of love, peace, joy, and long-suffering—the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) that give us the victory over irritations. The problem is that like natural fruit, the fruit of the Spirit must be *developed*; they do not naturally or automatically manifest as our first response to the challenges of life. They take practice, practice, practice. Once we commit to intentionally exercising them, we will consistently advance to higher levels of spiritual and emotional maturity.

Another key to maintaining our peace when we encounter an irritation-triggering event is to change our perspective. Most of us tend to evaluate other people's actions through our personal lens. We focus on how *we* would behave in the situation:

*"I'm always mindful of my volume when using my mobile phone in public."*

*"I keep a proper physical distance when interacting with others, never violating their space."*

*"I would never do that."*

*"I... ", "I... ", "I... "*

What we don't realize is that this mindset sets us up as judge and jury in the case of those who do not conduct themselves as they "should." I'm convinced that if we limited or even eliminated the word *should* from our thoughts and our expressions, we would experience less inner turmoil.

I should know. I grew up in a strict Pentecostal environment where shoulds, rules, and legalistic expectations

reigned. Later in life, I found myself constantly irritated with people who didn't do what I thought they should—spiritually, financially, relationally, or socially. It goes without saying that I was always in a mode of judging others.

If you find yourself caught in a “should trap,” here are three surefire escape hatches:

1. When you feel that someone's irritating behavior will become a pattern if you do not address it, calmly explain to the person how her actions affect you and ask her to stop. *Example 1:* “Karen, when I invite you to dinner, the invitation is extended to you only. Please do not ask someone else to join you without consulting me first.” *Example 2:* “Would you mind holding down your voices? I'm having a hard time hearing the speaker.” (No need to call them rude or inconsiderate.)
2. Rather than judging or criticizing the offensive behavior, engage in a little self-interrogation instead:
  - What personal preference or strongly held belief/tradition is this person violating?
  - Is any real harm being done here to me or to others?
  - Does the offender remind me of another irritating person I need to confront?



- Is the offender mirroring an aspect of my own behavior that I disdain?
  - What response to this irritation would be the most honoring to my heavenly Father?
3. Give the offender the benefit of the doubt or seek to understand his shortcomings. For example, the tailgater may not be intent on bullying you but simply has poor driving habits. The inconsiderate mobile phone user is not deliberately annoying you but is merely too self-focused to think about how he's affecting others. The boss who takes all the credit for the success of the project is simply an insecure leader with poor management skills.

Choosing the responses above is where the fruit of love comes into play; for “love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). Further, do you really want to let temporary, non-eternal matters rob you of your peace and joy?

### *Faith Declaration*

The Holy Spirit is manifesting the fruit of love, joy, and peace in me right now and empowering me to respond with patience to every irritation.



## Day 2

# Frustration: Know When to Hold 'em or Fold 'em

*Frustration: a feeling of displeasure toward an obstacle (person, event, or physical barrier) that hinders your progress toward a goal or fails to meet your expectation*

Life hasn't been easy for Carrie. Born out of wedlock, she saw her father on only a few occasions during her entire childhood. She was raised primarily by her godly and strict grandmother while her own mother worked to help support them all. During her last year in high school, Carrie became pregnant by a young man who chose to have nothing to do with their daughter, Sadie. Undaunted, Carrie and her mother tried to give Sadie all the comforts of life. However, living such a privileged existence didn't give Sadie much incentive to survive on her own. After high school, Sadie never quite got her act together. To this day she continues to be plagued with relational and financial drama.

In addition to dealing with Sadie's woes, Carrie's aging mother requires increasingly more time and attention. Further, her husband, Jim, could find work

only out of state, so he relocated fifteen hundred miles away and could afford to come home only twice a year. This lasted for over a decade! In the midst of it all, Carrie developed an advanced stage of breast cancer. After extended chemotherapy, surgery, and an outpouring of prayers, she won the battle and is now cancer free. However, she was forced to close down her small restaurant—a business she had built from scratch.

Then came the 2008 economic downturn. Jim was laid off from his job. Even though his skills were now relatively marketable in their hometown, he opted for early retirement. He returned home content to live on his meager pension rather than seek contract work, much to Carrie's dismay. Further, because Carrie is known for her survivor skills and positive mindset, she is the go-to counselor and sounding board for the majority of her relatives and friends.

Despite experiencing one frustrating situation after another, Carrie maintains a tremendous sense of humor, a no-nonsense communication style, clear boundaries in her relationships, and a commitment to her mental and physical well-being. She's quick to acknowledge circumstances that are outside of her control. She often exclaims, "I'm not going to let these folks and their issues kill me!" She finds refuge in fishing, engaging in home-decorating projects, and serving her community. When the pressures of life mount, she has been known to hop in her car and drive across the country alone to get away from it all. Carrie knows how to master frustration.

What about you? Are you frustrated for one reason

or another with your spouse, boss, child, or others in your circle of interaction? Maybe you are even frustrated with God! Have your frustrations affected your emotional well-being or brought you to the brink of an angry reaction?

I fought being frustrated with God when He called me off my dream job in 2006 to speak and write full-time—only to find myself six months later battling a neurological condition (trigeminal neuralgia) that frequently rendered me speechless with no advance warning. I stood in faith for my healing. However, there were times that I wondered, “What gives? I’m just trying to obey You. I could have stayed on my job where I had sick leave and other benefits!”

As an act of faith, I continued to schedule speaking engagements and media interviews. I often showed up not knowing if I’d be able to talk or not. At one conference, I had to place a wad of small makeup sponges inside my jaw to minimize the excruciating pain caused by the movement of my mouth; the protruding jaw was a curious sight.

I refused to get depressed. I believed then as I do today that “the joy of the LORD is [my] strength” (Nehemiah 8:10) and that all things work together for my good because I love God and I’m called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). After fourteen months of debilitating pain, I underwent brain surgery. By the grace of God, I experienced no side effects. I developed inner strength, a greater sense of dependence on Him, and a new level of faith.

Frustrating people or circumstances are inevitable, but you can master your response to them. Here's how:

- Face the reality of which situations are *controllable* (problems with your boss, pastor, spouse, child, or friend; violations of your boundaries or preferences) and which are *noncontrollable* (changing someone's affections toward you or others).
- In controllable situations, exercise courage by taking the necessary actions to address or eliminate the frustration (confront the offender in a loving manner, seek another job, set relationship boundaries with appropriate consequences, exit toxic relationships). Don't delay. Procrastination here will only solidify your frustration.
- Reevaluate your expectations. Consider if you are being inflexible or unreasonable. Maybe you have too many shoulds for yourself or others. This is a prime area for blind spots, so get some objective input from a wise outsider here.
- For the noncontrollable issues, recognize your limitation and stop attempting to do what only God can do—"know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em." (These lyrics to a popular song by Kenny Rogers refer to a gambler's decision to stay in or get out of the game depending on the hand he has been dealt. We use the phrase in various personal or business situations to describe the decision to pursue an effort or to throw in the

towel.) When you come to grips with the reality that you cannot influence a certain frustrating situation, halt your efforts and limit your involvement to praying for divine intervention.

- Hide Scriptures in your heart that emphasize the perfect wisdom and timing of God for your life. For starters see the “Faith Declaration” below. Accept His plan and His schedule—not with sad resignation but with an attitude of gratitude for His foreknowledge of all that concerns you and His desire for the best outcome.

### *Faith Declaration*

“All the days ordained for me were written in [God’s] book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16 NIV), therefore, no one can thwart His plan for my life (Isaiah 14:27). I will exercise the courage to do what my Father would have me to do to overcome controllable frustrations and the wisdom to entrust the noncontrollable situations entirely to Him. The Holy Spirit is working the fruit of patience in my heart right now. I accept God’s will to be done His way in every aspect of my life.