

Learn to control, channel anger into positive outlets, therapist recommends_100404

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DALLAS—Anger is not a sin; it's an emotion that needs to be controlled and channeled into positive action, Mark Gomez, a therapist with Rapha Christian Counseling, told youth ministers during a workshop at Lakeside Baptist Church in Dallas.

The workshop was part of series sponsored by Dallas Baptist Association for youth ministers.

Time constraints, finances, children, car problems and a myriad of other problems constantly build pressure in lives—just like what happens when a soft drink can is shaken, Gomez observed.

The question, he said, is whether the pressure is going to be expelled in small, safe bursts or spewed all over people nearby.

“You're always going to have pressure,” Gomez asserted. “The question is 'How are you going to channel it, release it, control it?’”

Gomez, a former pastor, said the Bible gives evidence that anger is a neutral emotion and can be channeled for either good or bad.

He pointed to Proverbs 17:27, which says a wise man is even-tempered.

“He is even-tempered, not non-tempered. It doesn't say he doesn't have anger. It says he controls it,” Gomez said.

“Anger is natural and spiritual. It is a part of human nature, but it also is a part of God's nature.”

He explained that being created in the image of God makes humans moral creatures with a concern for right and wrong.

But anger is an emotion that must be kept under control, he cautioned.

“Anger is power; it's like dynamite,” he said.

He also compared it to a river. “Like a roaring river, it can wipe out a village, or it can be channeled to produce electrical power for that village.”

The first step in channeling anger is to know what precedes it.

“Pay attention to your body and how it is that your body does anger. Pay attention to your kids in your youth group and what they do when they are feeling the pressure build, but also pay attention to yourself,” he counseled the youth ministers.

It is important to deal with anger before it becomes the controlling factor, Gomez said.

“If I'm going to work with someone on their anger, the last place I'm going to start is the feelings. Thoughts are the key,” he said. “Anger as an emotion is something you can't control directly.”

Gomez used a volcano as another illustration of anger. Behaviors are the

rock and lava that spew from the top, but other forces beneath the surface are the real cause.

“Anger is not a primary emotion. It is secondary. It has to have another core emotion to get anger going,” he said.

“You never vomit from the neck up. It has to have a deeper source. Anger is the same way. Something deeper is needed to push it up.”

Some of the core emotions that fuel anger are frustration, fear, hate, depression, grief, guilt and shame.

“While anger sometimes seems like it comes out of nowhere, if you do an 'anger autopsy,' you'll see the patterns involved,” he said.

Anger often begins in a gap between expectations and reality.

“The gap between our expectations and reality are where emotions are born,” Gomez said. “The farther our expectations are from reality the more volatile the emotion.”

Part of changing expectations is changing thoughts and words. Words like “must,” “never” and “always” provide for unrealistic expectations. “These are words that demonstrate no flexibility or room for compromise in the way a need can be met,” Gomez said.

Gomez turned to Romans 12:2 to illustrate his point. “We are not renewed by the changing of our emotions, but our minds, our thoughts,” he said. “The bottom line is I need to change my expectations.”

One youth minister at the workshop said he could see how he needed to change some of his thinking to curb his own anger.

“I have to watch having anger toward certain students in my youth group. I'm beginning to see that maybe I have some unrealistic expectations for

them-that I don't need to look at them and think, 'You should be better than this by now,'" he said.

Gomez told the youth ministers they can help change the way teens react to frustrations. "Teens are still moldable. The concrete hasn't set yet," he said.

He put on a tool belt that held nothing but different sizes and types of hammers to illustrate.

"Some of us don't have enough different tools in our emotional tool belt-not enough coping skills," he said.

"Some kids, all they have in their tool belts are hammers for whacking. It may not be physical. It may be verbal, but that can do just as much damage."

The test for whether anger is healthy is whether it restores relationships or destroys them, he said.

"An angry God aims to restore, bringing people together, to ultimately give them peace. Satan's anger aims to destroy, divide and bring fear," he said.

Core emotions that may bring on a healthy anger are a hatred of evil, zealousness for righteousness and disappointment.

Gomez used Jesus' cleansing of the temple to illustrate.

"Jesus expected the temple to be a place of worship, and it was turned into a mall where common people were being used and abused to the point where the last thing on their minds was worship. And worship was supposed to be the only purpose for the temple," he said.

"God has the same zeal for cleansing the lives of young people and restoring them, just as he did that temple 2,000 years ago," Gomez added.

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