

HOW TO PLUG THE ANGRY VOLCANO

Would you love to get even with the rude driver on the freeway? Do you fantasise about how to reduce the unreasonable boss to size? Perhaps you have been abandoned in a relationship, and want revenge. If this is your situation, you are not alone. The instinct to get even is very strong.

Revenge fantasies are one way we cope with the hurts of life. But I want you to consider a much better way.

Edith Taylor's story illustrates this better way. She was sure she was the luckiest woman on the block. Even though they'd been married 23 years, Edith's heart still skipped a beat when her husband Karl walked into the room. And Karl seemed to be a man very much in love with his wife. Whenever business took him out of town, he'd write her a long letter every night. He sent small gifts from every place he visited.

In the early 1950s, Karl was sent to Japan for a few months on business. This time, no little gifts came back. Edith just assumed he was saving every penny for the home they hoped to buy someday.

The lonesome months dragged by. The job in Japan was taking longer and longer. Karl kept writing that he needed another three weeks, another month.

Edith took work in a factory in order to save more toward their dream home. But Karl's letters came less and less frequently. A whole year passed without communication, and then finally a letter came. It began with these words: "Dear Edith, I wish there was a kinder way to tell you that we are no longer married..." Edith was stunned. She read that Karl had signed divorce papers. He had married a Japanese woman named Aiko, who was assigned to his quarters as a maid. She was 19. Edith was 48.

You can imagine the awful sense of rejection a woman in Edith's situation

would have felt. You can imagine the growing sense of rage. It was so horribly unfair! She'd invested her life in this man! You can also imagine how much she would want to get even.

Perhaps you feel the same way Edith did. Are there people in your life who have hurt you deeply? Do you feel you have reason to be angry, even bitter? Lying in bed late at night, do you dream up ways to get even with them?

I would like to reflect on the anger and hurt we feel when life and people treat us unfairly: the kind of anger that can eat away at our emotions, that can push all thoughts out of our heads except one—getting even.

However, this focus on getting even can

create even more problems for us than the original hurt. When we keep focusing on the person who has hurt us, week after week, month after month, we tend to forget about an even bigger enemy. That enemy can cause even more damage.

A research study recruited about 1,000 heart attack victims, who were all “Type A” personalities: in other words, strongly driven people. Dr. Meyer Friedman divided them into two groups. One group received counsel about diet and exercise habits. The other group received the same diet and exercise advice PLUS counselling on how to reduce angry, hostile behaviour.

Four-and-a-half years later, Dr. Friedman assessed both groups. The people in the second group, who had learned to deal with their anger, showed a 45% reduction

in rates of mortality and heart disease. Quite a dramatic turn-around!

The bottom line is that hostility and anger can have fatal consequences, literally. The emotional damage caused when other people hurt us doesn't kill us, but our own prolonged, unresolved anger certainly can. You may want with all your heart to get even with that enemy, but what you really need to do is get even with your anger! It's the real enemy. That's why in the book of Proverbs we read: "A man of great wrath will suffer punishment" (Proverbs 19:19).

It's the anger itself that punishes you. Uncontrolled anger can choke the life out of you.

It's time to take back our lives! It's time to get even with anger!

In order to control rage, we need to be clear about the kind of anger we're discussing. Up to a certain point, feeling angry is a natural emotional reaction. When someone hurts us, it's normal to feel bad. We don't have to pretend that we enjoy being abused.

Edith Taylor, as a Christian believer, may have felt pressure to forgive her husband immediately, and to put away all hostility. But deep hurt takes time to heal. Edith needed to tell her husband how betrayed she felt; she needed to get her feelings out as part of the healing process.

When we're unfairly treated or deeply hurt we need to go through a period of anger, and express our hurt and sense of outrage. It's very similar to the grieving process that people go through after the death of

a loved one.

But anger, like mourning, needs to come to an end; it needs an appropriate resolution. We don't want it to settle down as a tenant in our hearts. Anger must never become the permanent perspective through which we view the world. Anger becomes dangerous when we hold onto it for too long.

The kind of anger we are discussing here is the anger that just won't go away: the anger and hostility that have become part of our temperament.

We have just stated that getting even with our anger does not mean stamping out our feelings. It does, however, mean dealing with that nasty, bitter tenant who just refuses to move out.

Let's consider some practical steps that will help you achieve this.

First, you must face your anger. You can't get even with anger if you don't know it exists. For some people, anger lurks underground: unacknowledged, building up for an eventual explosion.

Take Dennis, for example. He always thought of himself as an easy-going guy who could put up with most anything. His wife had a habit of venting her insecurity by blaming and criticising and belittling him. He thought he was doing the right thing by sitting there and passively absorbing this. He always said he was sorry and would try harder to be a better husband.

Dennis never thought he was angry. In fact, he was rather proud of his calm demeanor.

But finally, one day, Dennis hit a brick wall. He woke up and realised that all his feelings of love for his wife were gone. In their place was an incredible, suffocating rage. All he could think of was getting out of the relationship.

Do you constantly find yourself having to suppress emotions that are simmering just below the surface? Maybe you keep telling yourself, “I’m not an angry person; I’m not mad.” But maybe you’re saying it through gritted teeth.

If you are to confront anger head-on, you must be honest with yourself – and with God. When King David finally acknowledged before God what was in his heart—the lust that had led him into adultery—he wrote in Psalms: “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you

teach me wisdom in the inmost place” (Psalm 51:6).

God wants you to open up your innermost being to Him, because that’s the only way He can get into your heart and help you heal. So, tell God exactly how you’re feeling. Tell Him that you’re mad; tell Him why you feel betrayed or abandoned.

Now, you’re ready for the second step. You get even with your anger by giving it up to God. To learn how to do that, let us take the example of an inner-city kid named Ben. Ben grew up in a Detroit ghetto, a place where anger flows freely in the streets, a place where getting even with anyone who disrespects you is a way of life.

By the time Ben got into high school, he had developed quite a temper. One

afternoon he was listening to the radio when his buddy yelled, “You call that music?” and changed to another station. Ben shot back, “It’s better than what you like!” and grabbed for the dial.

His buddy resisted. In that instant, anger took hold of Ben. He grabbed the camping knife that he carried in his back pocket, snapped it open, and lunged at his friend’s belly with all his strength. Fortunately, the kid was wearing a heavy ROTC belt buckle. The blade hit the buckle with such force that it snapped and dropped to the ground.

Ben stared down at the broken blade and his knees just about gave way. He had almost KILLED someone. He’d almost killed a good friend. Over what?

This incident forced Ben to face his anger

head-on. He had to do something about it. He could not handle his temper alone.

So, this young kid, who had been brought up to know God, prayed, “Lord, take this temper from me. If you don’t, I’ll never be free of it. You can change me.”

After going home, Ben locked himself in a bathroom and began reading the book of Proverbs very earnestly. He read many texts that talked explicitly about uncontrolled anger and where it leads. The words seemed to have been written just for him. This verse impressed him the most: “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Proverbs 16:32).

These words gave Ben hope, something to aim at. He made a commitment to read

Scripture each day and gave himself and his problem wholeheartedly to God.

A sense of peace replaced Ben's anguish and panic. In fact, he walked out of that room feeling God had changed him. He told himself, "My temper will never again control me. I'm free."

God certainly dealt decisively with this young man's uncontrolled anger. In fact, the hands that had once lunged with a knife became the disciplined, skilled hands wielding a healing knife. For many years, Dr. Ben Carson worked as one of America's most respected pediatric neurosurgeons.

You can't get even with destructive anger on your own. You must give it up to God and let Him work inside you. When you

have faced anger head-on and given it to God, you are ready for the final step that turns it into something else. With God's help, you can now transform that negative energy into a positive pursuit. God will give you the power to redirect your emotions towards a worthy goal. That is the ultimate way for you to get even with persistent anger: you replace it with something better.

The Bible often uses a very instructive phrase to describe God. He is "slow to anger, and abounding in love" (Joel 2:13, NIV). The Psalmist tells us: "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime" (Psalm 30:5, NIV).

Take your cue from your Heavenly Father. Anger may be necessary, but it must lead, at some point, into the abundance of love.

Edith Taylor did get even with her anger in a most remarkable way. A few years after her Karl married Aiko, he developed lung cancer. Edith received a letter from Japan telling her that he was dying.

But this woman didn't taste sweet revenge. She was thinking about something else. By this time Karl and Aiko had two small daughters. Karl had been saving money in order to send them to school in America. But the hospital bills had taken everything. Aiko would barely be able to support the children amid the hardships of post-war Japan.

Edith made a decision. She told Aiko that, if she was willing, she would take the two girls, Marie and Helen, and bring them up in America. Needless to say, Aiko, as a young mother, couldn't bear the thought

of giving up her children.

Months passed. Months of poverty and despair for Aiko. Finally, she agreed to send the girls to the kind woman she called “dear Aunt Edith”.

Edith, now a woman of 54, began to mother a three-year-old and a five-year-old. She knew it wouldn’t be easy. The girls had forgotten the little bit of English they knew. But they learned fast under Edith’s care. Soon their pale faces grew plump, and the fear left their eyes. Edith had found a reason to live.

Aiko wrote regularly, asking about her daughters. What games did Helen like to play? Did Marie cry a lot? Through Aiko’s broken English, Edith could read intense loneliness. She herself certainly knew all

about loneliness. Still, Edith had her own problems. It was especially difficult in those days to be both mother and wage-earner. Long hours at the factory left her tired and frail. Edith had to hire a woman to care for the girls while she was away. When she became ill, she wouldn't stop working, afraid of missing a day's pay. Finally, she came down with pneumonia and had to spend two weeks in hospital.

Lying there in that bed, Edith faced some hard facts. She was wearing out now. She would be old before the girls were grown. Now, Edith made another big decision. There was a way that she could get even with life's unfairness; there was something she could do to counter anger and bitterness. She could respond with a final act of love. Edith decided to bring the girls' real mother to America.

It wasn't easy. There was a long line of Japanese citizens waiting to enter the country. But people learned of Edith's remarkable decision and helped get special permission for this young Japanese woman to come to America.

In August of 1957, Aiko Taylor landed at New York's International Airport. Edith, waiting by the gate to greet her, had a moment of fear. Would she hate this woman who had taken Karl away from her?

The last person to disembark was a young woman so thin and small that Edith at first thought she was a child. She didn't walk down the stairs. She just stood there, clutching the railing. Edith realised that Aiko was near panic.

So, she called out her name, and then Aiko

rushed down the stairs and collapsed in her arms. In that moment, as they held each other, Edith realised that love was indeed the answer.

Her husband had never come back, but his precious children had. Now, this young woman who also desperately needed love had come into her life.

How do we keep anger and bitterness from eating away at our lives? How do we get even with life's unfairness? In the end, there is only one answer. We have to find a way to give. We have to channel that energy inside us into the way of love.

There is one thing we can be sure of when life isn't fair. God still is fair and loving. He is there in the heartache and tragedy. Friends and life itself may let us down,

but God never lets us down. His love is constant, His kindness is never-ending. God can turn all the anger in our life into something better. He can bring the hostility and bitterness to an end. He can re-channel our rage into a positive pursuit. He can enable us to share His love.

Please give God a chance right now. Are you willing to open up your heart to Him? Are you willing to open up every dark corner, every painful secret?

Please give the Great Physician room to work. Please entrust your hurts into His skillful hands.

