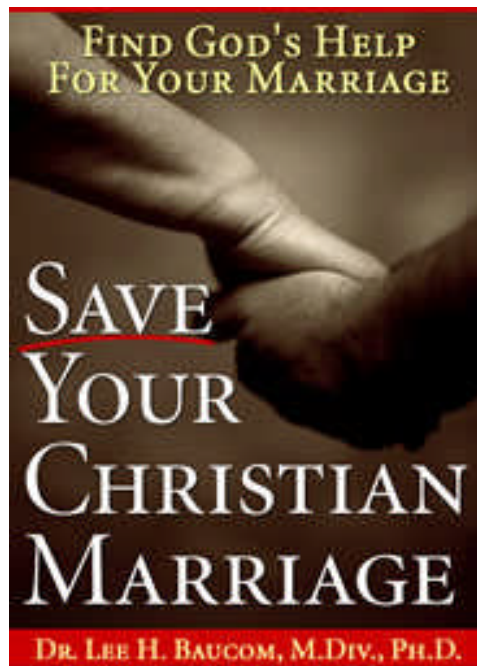


Dealing With Anger & Resentment Yours and Your Spouse's

A Special Report by Lee H. Baucom, Ph.D.
Author of [Save Your Christian Marriage](#)



Copyright © 2007, All Rights Reserved
Do Not Redistribute or Republish Without Explicit
Permission of the Author

It had happened again. Jenny and Sam spent a peaceful month together. No blow-ups, no crises. Then, one small incident and they were, as they said, “headed down the slippery slope.” A simple comment, really a stab at humor by Sam, and Jenny spent the whole day building up steam. She had missed the dry humor and reacted to the content of the comment, not the irony intended.

They didn’t speak until the kids were in bed, but when they finally spoke, Jenny was at her wit’s end and Sam didn’t have a clue. More than that, Sam’s response was, in his mind, an apology. For Jenny, it was an excuse (really a rationalization). Both were deeply wounded, but neither would give an inch.

The sad part was neither wanted to go in that direction. Neither wanted to hit that “slippery slope.” And both had that little voice going on, even as they did battle, saying, “This is ridiculous. Why am I even arguing? I don’t even buy what I’m saying.” But down they slid.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever had that experience? A little voice is saying “what am I doing?” but another voice, even stronger, is pushing full-speed ahead. You find yourself where you don’t want to be. You find yourself angry or dealing with an angry spouse (or both!).

I don’t promise that this report will end all angry exchanges (I would be a rich man, and an international celebrity!). But I can promise a new understanding of anger/resentment, along with some useful tools to deal with these strong emotions. So, hang with me, and let’s get through some theoretical stuff, then we will get to some tools.

A New Model Of Anger

What do you understand about anger? Have you heard the idea of “getting your anger out?” Perhaps you have tried the yelling, the punching bag, your pillow, a tennis racket. But that doesn’t work. In fact, research shows this is actually counterproductive.

Our understanding of anger is the problem. We treat anger like a primary emotion. It is not. Anger is always a secondary emotion, a reaction to something else. And this “something else” is locked deep in your brain. You see, there is a biological component to anger and a psychological one. Miss one or the other, and your picture is incomplete.

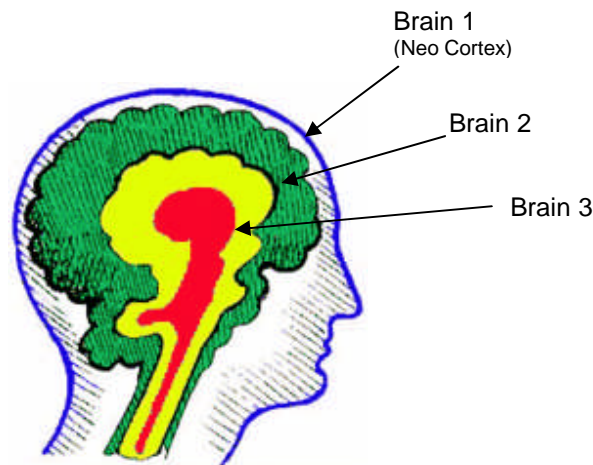
The Biological Reality

Experts tell us that our brain has three different layers. Each layer has a distinct function, but some are more primitive than others.

We have a hard time accepting the more primitive of our functions, and prefer to think about our rational/logical nature. But we are fully run by our emotions, often with our rationalizing as a way of explaining the emotional.

Don't believe me? Take a look at your wrist. If you have a watch there, think for one moment. What kind of watch is it? If you are like most people, your watch is not a 5 dollar digital. It is likely to have cost a bit more. But watches are to tell you time. A rational decision is for a cheap digital watch that will be very accurate, but also be very inexpensive. Anything else is an emotional decision (my watch is a more expensive dive watch, so I am likely right in there with you!).

Your brain has three layers, as you can see in the diagram below:



Let's start with the most primitive part of your brain and work outward.

Brain 3 is the most primitive part of your brain, and has only one purpose: survival. This is the part of the brain that allows you to breathe without thinking (although you can override this). It keeps your heart beating, and your body temperature at a survivable level.

But it also has the important function of getting you out of the way of trouble. It has the job of watching for threat, and getting you to respond nearly instantly to that threat. Unfortunately, as we will see, it is not very good at judging whether a perceived threat is real or not.

Also, this part of the brain is about survival, not about getting along. Survival of yourself and your genes does not require you to be happily connected to someone else (merely sexually connected). So, when survival is primary, all other functions are secondary. When you feel threatened, getting along is secondary.

There are two important structures in this part of the brain (all neurologists and neurosurgeons, please excuse my generalities). These two structures are the **amygdala** and the **hippocampus**.

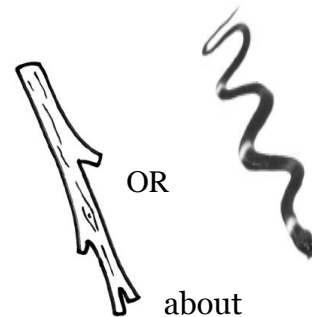
The amygdala is your “early warning detection system.” Your hippocampus is the part that assesses the accuracy later. Pretty much, this layer of the brain is wired to “shoot first, ask questions later!”

The amygdala is an almond-shaped structure that begins functioning before birth. If something appears to present a threat, the amygdala sounds the alarm, placing your entire body on alert. Your heart races, your breathing pattern shifts, adrenaline is flowing, your muscles are tense, palms sweaty, all in preparation for defending yourself.

There is a fairly direct connection from your eyes to this area of the brain, as one of the major sources of information for threat is visual. There is also a close connection to your ears, your other major source of information (imagine hearing a loud, angry voice and the reaction your body makes).

In order to preserve you, a lower threshold of threat is important. In other words, a heightened sense of threat is more likely to save you than a low sense of threat. Instead of a *specific, known* threat, your amygdala works on the *possible* threat. Your amygdala certainly believes in the “better safe than sorry approach” to risk-assessment!

Here’s an example of that process: I love trail running. I often run the mountain biking and hiking trails of my area. For the most part, a twisted ankle here and there is my price. But my Amygdala is looking for bigger potential threats. If I round a corner and see a curvy stick on the trail, my survival is based on an instant reaction, not an “I’ll take a closer look” approach. If it is a snake, I am safer at a distance. Without even really thinking about it, I come to a sudden stop. My amygdala has put on the brakes.



Or a more common, every-day example: I am driving down the road going a little fast, round a bend, and see traffic at a standstill. My foot almost automatically hits the brakes, bringing me to a stop. Had I needed to think about it, I would have rear-ended the cars in front and put myself at risk. Once I am at a safe stop, suddenly my mind is flooded with recognition of the potential threat. There is an automatic response that can then be followed by a more cognitive response.

Your hippocampus is where the recording of memories starts. So, it is constantly assessing whether a perceived threat is a real threat. If a threat plays out to be real, it is important to remember it for future reference. If it is

not a threat, that doesn't mean the crooked stick won't scare me the next time. Remember, the Amygdala is looking for possible threat.

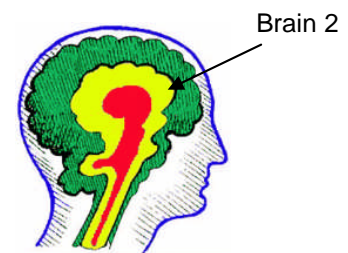
Now apply it to marriage. A simple look on your spouse's face, a tone in a voice, a word spoken or any other shadow of threat can send someone into a threat response. It only takes a shadow of possibility of threat to begin the cascade in the body that culminates in a fear→anger response.

When a threat is perceived, we are thrown into a state of "fear." Initially, this would not be the fear we equate with as an emotional response. It is strictly a biological, reactive fear. Another way of looking at it is as a bodily arousal. Your systems are on "red alert," ready for action. How our mind perceives it is partly due to interpretation. Some people find the experience of skydiving to be exhilarating; others find it to be terrifying. Same experience, same bodily response, but a very different interpretation. At this point, we are speaking of the biological state of fear. So, quite literally, we are wired for fear.

As I stated earlier, we are talking about a biological fear at this level. It is without emotion. My son has a couple of small anoles, a type of small lizard. These lizards eat crickets (I never imagined having to go to a pet store to buy crickets!). The other night, I was feeding them, and the two chose the same cricket to devour. Obviously, one beat the other out by a split-second. Immediately, the one that lost out bit the other on the rear leg. There was, however, no emotion involved. It was purely a response to a threat to its survival.

And if I were to actually discover that the stick on my path was really a snake, and I was unable to avoid the snake, it might bite me. But the bite would be devoid of emotion, since the snake is incapable of that.

The capacity for emotion comes in the second layer of the brain, Brain 2. Think about a dog. You can poke him and poke him, and he might not bite. One poke too many, and he will bite not just out of threat, but out of anger. Years ago, we had a small dog. One day, the postman sprayed her with pepper spray, even though she was in a fence and not a threat. Our dog never forgot it. Any person that looked like a postman provoked a rageful response (and our mail suffered, too).

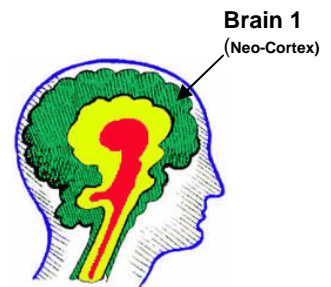


Or what about elephants that are kept in captivity, seemingly quiet and obedient until the day they run amok, often with fatal results? This is because mammals are capable of emotions from the next level of brain.

So when I round the corner, see the traffic, and automatically come to a standstill, once I am safe, I can be flooded with emotional responses from

relief to fear to anger. That cascade is created because of the mammalian brain.

But there is the third level of the brain that is what makes us human, allowing us to use logic, reason, and thoughtfulness in determining some of our actions. The upper level is known as the Neo-Cortex. It is capable of allowing us to think about our future, recognize our self-hood, and consider such issues as morality and ethics.



This part of the brain is God’s creation that separates us from the other organisms. Our capacity for even thinking about God, morality, right and wrong, and having a choice in actions/reactions comes from this part of the brain.

Unfortunately, this level is not as important in survival, so in some ways, it becomes a secondary system. Some theorists believe that there are 50 connections from Brain 3 to the neo-cortex for every one in the opposite direction. In other words, when you have perceived a threat deep within your brain, your neo-cortex may recognize there is no threat, but for every scream of “no threat,” there are 50 messages yelling “threat, threat!” Which one do you think gets the most attention?

And that is the mystery of your small voice observing how ridiculous your argument is, and how you don’t even believe what you are saying, even as you witness yourself attacking and destroying someone you love. Your neo-cortex is aware that you are not under attack, but the deeper parts of your brain are getting you to respond as if your survival was at stake.

When dealing with the threat, there are really only two responses your more primitive brain recognizes: fight or flight. “Fight” is about destroying the threat. “Flight” is about getting out of the way. In a wilder environment, predators rely on fight, and prey relies on flight. That places us somewhere in the middle. We can feel like predator or prey, depending on the perceived threat.

Which means that when we have a conflict with our spouse, we are going to respond, when there is a cascade of threat and emotions, with either flight or fight. Both responses leave us with very limited opportunities to actually solve the situation. As one theorist states it, when you are dealing with an angry person you are “arguing with a crocodile.” With two people upset, you only have two crocodiles going at it!



The **Flight Response** is a strong desire to get away or avoid the situation. If you find yourself saying “I’m not going to talk about that,” or “I’m leaving,” or “Well, let’s just divorce,” or some other phrase that is an attempt to end the conversation, you are in the midst of a flight response.

In the midst of a flight response, there will be little chance of solving anything because the whole situation is avoided. The effect of a flight response is the sense for the other person that conflict is useless, will get nowhere, and the other person is unwilling to even enter into a conversation.

The **Fight Response** looks and feels more violent, but is no more effective than a flight response. The fight response is a strong desire to win at any cost. When you find yourself feeling the need to not just prove your point, but win the argument, that is a fight response. When you begin to pull in other issues and situations, rather than just dealing with the issue at hand, you are in a fight response. When you make threats, raise your voice, push, hit, or become violent in any way, you are in the midst of a fight response.

As in the flight response, the fight response makes sense in the instant you are in it, but upon any reflection, you can quickly see the uselessness of the response. Usually, it amounts to using a sledgehammer to place a nail for hanging a picture: hard to control, way too much power behind it, and likely to take out the wall before the picture can be hung!

The Psychological Reality

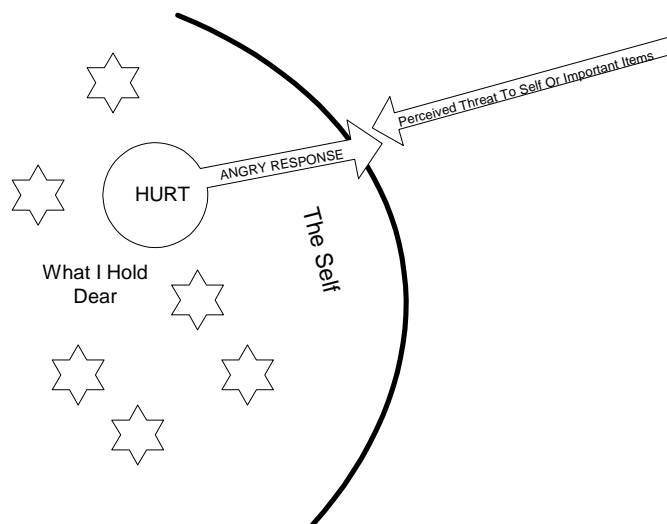
The biological reality of anger is manifest in a threat/response. The beginning point is fear, as a biological level. But humans have the capacity of not only a biological response (including emotional), but also a psychological response. In other words, our capacity to think and reason creates a whole new level of response, for good and ill.

Our psychological response is a complex and complicated issue. There are so many levels to our psychological life, many too deep to even get a handle on. We respond to current situations based on our genetic predisposition (that shapes our psychology), our family influence, and past experiences in the world.

While the specific reasons we respond may vary, the fact that we respond, and how we respond is generally the same for people. In fact, it is very similar to

the biological reality, except that it is much more based in our thinking and responses to our thinking.

For a moment, let's use the emotional term of anger, rather than fear. Our interpretation within our psychology of the biological sense of fear and threat is anger. We all know that feeling, but we usually tie it immediately to what the other person has said or done: "I am angry because of how he/she treated me." In reality, that misses a central issue – anger is always a secondary emotion. It comes as a reaction to the primary emotion of hurt. In other words, when we feel hurt, we are likely to respond with anger.



When what we hold dear (self-perceptions, future hopes, ideals, morals, ethics, other people, etc.) feel threatened, our natural response is to feel hurt (misunderstood, wrongly attacked, disregarded, ignored, etc.), and our secondary response is anger.

Ask yourself this question: when you feel hurt, how often do you manage to say, "hey, that really hurt my feelings"? Rather, we respond to our pain by lashing out in anger.

Unfortunately, it is much easier to deal with someone's hurt than to deal with his or her anger. Anger is met with anger. Hurt can be met with compassion or remorse. Which raises the question of why we respond with anger. And that places us back to the threat model.

As I stated in the opening, we are designed for survival, not necessarily community. Community is a conscious decision that has us acting counter to our immediate tendencies. In other words, in order to have a connection, we

must rely on our neo-cortex, and make it a conscious choice to not respond on automatic.

And since we all are human, we all carry around the same potential fears. There are three basic psychological fears that can easily be threatened:

- 1) **I won't have enough.**
- 2) **I won't be good enough.**
- 3) **I won't be loved enough**

When any of these fears are triggered, we will likely have an angry response. And while these fears are typical for everyone, many have a stronger sense of fear from one of the three.

Marriage troubles tend to put all three basic fears onto the table. "If things end, I won't have enough, certainly won't be loved, and obviously, I was not good enough." That is one potent recipe for a fear/anger response that is bound up in our biology and our psychology.

Dealing With Your Anger

When dealing with anger, it is important to first focus on your own, then focus on how to deal with your spouse's anger toward you. As long as you are likely to respond to your spouse's anger with your own anger, you are at a dead-end. And as long as you respond to your own sense of threat/hurt, you will only fuel your spouse's anger.

Dealing With Your Biological Response

Since the biological response to threat is so automatic, it is important for you to have some tools to back off the automatic response. There are several steps you will want to attend to in order to short-circuit this process. As a biological process, you must deal with your biology, your body.

- 1) **Monitor yourself** for signs and symptoms of increased response to threat: quickening breathing or heart rate, sweaty palms, muscles tensing, tension headache, or sweating. This is your first sign that your brain is registering a threat.
- 2) **Breathe** correctly. There is a natural braking system and accelerator system built right into our body – our breathing! When our body believes us to be under attack, we begin to breathe through our chest, expanding only the upper part of our lungs. This allows our body to keep the muscles in our abdomen tight, thus protecting our important

- organs. This happens automatically. But if we disrupt that style of breathing by “belly breathing,” we are signaling to our primitive brain that there is no threat. Practice this: lay down on your back in bed, one hand on your navel, the other on your chestbone. Now, practice breathing so that the only hand that moves is the one on your navel. That is how you should be breathing. It is belly breathing, and provides oxygenation, and keeps your body relaxed, anyway. But when you are feeling some threat, consciously moving to belly breathing can short-circuit your brain’s threat response.
- 3) **Focus on the topic at hand.** When you are feeling a threat, it is easy to move into other areas outside the topic of the discussion. For instance, you may bring other occurrences or tangential issues onto the table that have little to no relevance in discussing the issue at hand. Also, you may find yourself with thoughts of fleeing or dominating. Those fight/flight thoughts can be dealt with by refocusing on the issue at hand.
 - 4) **Take a break, if necessary.** It takes your body 15 to 30 minutes to move away from the heightened threat arousal, if you cannot consciously move away from it (or breathe yourself away from it). During that time, the body has a chance of decreasing the adrenaline flowing in your system, and to basically “back down,” biologically.

Dealing With Your Psychological Response

Your psychological response is not unconnected from your biological, but does require another level of intervention. I will tell you at the outset, we all have habits of reacting to anger. These habits have been created through our years of life, and have their roots in how our families dealt with anger. We had good or bad examples of dealing with anger that is then solidified in our own reactions (good and bad) to anger.

Compound that with the fact that in marriages, couples tend to learn patterns, then take shortcuts. If you know how a conversation, argument, or fight is going to go, why wait? Just go for the ending. (Or at least that’s what we tell ourselves.) The reason is because we often do anger in damaging and destructive ways.

So if you begin to focus on dealing with your anger, don’t expect it to change overnight. You will have some successes and some failures, but if you persist in trying to change your habits, you will get to where you want to be.

Conscious Choice #1: Decide what is at threat. Whenever you find yourself angry or getting angry, ask the question, “what is being threatened here?” Sometimes, it will be a clear issue, idea, or decision. Often, it will be much more abstract. But you **MUST** ask yourself the question: what is being threatened?

Remember the 3 basic fears: 1) not having enough, 2) not being good enough, 3) not being loved enough. Often, one of these fears gets pricked when we feel a threat (and thus begin to feel anger).

Another area to consider is whether your sense of the ideal is under attack. We all carry within us an internal sense of how things should go, our ideal. When our ideal does not come through, our sense of what we can expect is challenged, often throwing us into a bit of a crisis. Perhaps you are aware of the times when you have imagined a conversation in your mind, where you start the conversation, the other person responds, then you respond, and back and forth it goes. That conversation is unlikely to happen, mostly because it is based in our understanding of the situation.

Such an understanding of the situation is rarely shared by the other person (which is the reason there is a conflict in the first place). So, when the conversation does not occur in your mind as you thought it would/should, that should rationally not be a surprise. Nonetheless, when this happens, we most often respond with anger. How dare that person not see the impeccable “logic” of your argument! But since the other person is viewing things from his or her perspective, that is the likely outcome.

Which leads us to:

Conscious Choice #2: Become aware of your internal dialogue.

Our mind can work for us or against us. More often than not, it works against us. The main reason is because our mind is constantly at work, but we forget it is at work. Your mind is designed to create thoughts. Some are useful thoughts, some are harmful, and some are neutral. This is not really the problem.

The problem is that we forget that we are thinking. We begin to assume that whatever is going on in our mind is reality. That conversation with your spouse? It should be “the conversation I wish we would have.” Instead, it becomes “the conversation we will have.” But it is never going to be.

How could our spouse miss the logic, the clear reason that plays so well in our own minds? Because your spouse’s mind is also interpreting and having an internal dialogue, but from a different perspective.

So the more you are aware of the internal dialogue going on within your mind, the more opportunities you get to recognize the internal dialogue versus the external realities. Another way of saying this is the more you know what is going on in your mind, the less impact it has when it doesn’t match reality.

Conscious Choice #3: Accept the fact that everyone is doing the best they can, where they are (that includes you). This is not the same as saying that everyone is at optimal performance. Rather, it is saying that given

the life situation, background, and experiences, people respond to whatever is happening to them in the best way they can. We may not respond the way we would like, and others may not respond how we would like, but this does not negate the truth of this.

And there are two implications to this. First, we have to let ourselves off the hook. While we can hold ourselves accountable and responsible, we don't have to blame ourselves. If I decide to stop blaming myself, I stop being paralyzed. If I take responsibility for my actions, I then have the power to make some changes.

Second, we have to give our spouses some room. If your spouse is doing the best he/she can (and be careful to manage that internal knee-jerk reaction that makes you want to say "No, he/she can do better"), then he/she deserves a little room, a little grace.

Which leads to:

Conscious Choice #4: Work to forgive. We have somehow made forgiveness something that is unselfishly done for the other person. That is half the truth. In reality, a majority of the time, forgiveness does more for the forgiver than the forgiven. Part of the reason is because so much of our discussions about forgiving happen in a religious context. But even in that context, we have lost the importance of forgiveness for the forgiver.

Often, the one who must be forgiven doesn't even know there is an issue, so in that case, there is no benefit in forgiving for the forgiven. And even when they know it, they may not even carry around the burden of not being forgiven as much as the forgiver carries the weight.

I have this image in my mind: Someone throws a sharp stone, and it strikes and hurts another. That person picks up the sharp rock as a reminder of what was done, and grips it tightly saying, "I won't let this go." The thrower has moved on, but the one who was hurt continues to carry around a rock that is cutting into that hand. Forgiveness is letting go of that rock.

When you truly forgive, your anger and resentment naturally fall away. You see, resentment is merely anger we have refused to let go of. For whatever reason, it seems important to hold onto it, even though it works like a weight upon our shoulders and erodes a relationship.

Forgiving lets us move forward. It allows us to start fresh. And for anyone stuck on the myth that forgiveness is giving permission to be hurt again, let that go! You are no safer refusing to forgive than by forgiving. In fact, when people can't find forgiveness, they often give up on even trying to prove themselves and repeat the same injuring.

Dealing With Your Spouse's Anger

But what if you are not the one who is angry? What if your spouse is the one who is angry? That, my friend, is the challenge of marriage. How do you assist in a process that is outside of you, and of which you have no control, but which intimately affects you?

Dealing with your spouse's anger is central to turning around a situation, and often a marriage. Deal well with your spouse's anger and you will be working toward resolution. Deal poorly with your spouse's anger and you may well be working toward dissolution –the ending of the relationship.

There are several important points to attend to:

Point #1: Behind all anger is hurt. It is much easier to attend to hurt than anger, and your spouse will feel more connected if you respond to the hurt. More importantly, if you know hurt is behind it, you may have an easier time weathering the storm of anger. Once the storm passes, you are likely to find it easier to reconnect if you have connected with the hurt.

So start by looking for the hurt. What might be threatening your spouse? Don't make a quick decision based on your perspective. Instead, try to place yourself in your spouse's shoes. Even if you do not believe your spouse is correct in what is feeling threatened, that is not what is important. The fact that there is a sense of threat should be enough.

You may even say, after your spouse has expressed anger, "I clearly hurt you. I'm not sure exactly what I did, but I did not want to hurt you. I am sorry you are hurt. Can you tell me what I did that hurt you, and what I can do to make it better?" That is a powerful shift. You immediately move away from your own anger, move toward your spouse, and automatically step into Point #2.

Point #2: Work to avoid meeting anger with anger. Whenever force is met with force in an intimate relationship, damage is done. And when unnecessary force is meeting misguided force, there is no reason for the damage.

Threat and anger, once understood, can be seen for what they are. Anger is an expression of hurt. Hurt is often a result of a sense of threat that is deeply seated in the biology of the brain. As such, anger and threat are an opportunity for growth or division, depending on whether the primitive brain or the top brain gets to reign. My vote is for the neo-cortex.

That means you avoid responding to anger with anger. One of the interesting observations is that we often express anger when we think we are expressing pain or hurt. And this is true for your spouse. He or she may approach you

with an angry attitude, but really be unaware of the fact that this anger is emerging. When you respond with anger, the other person is caught off-guard, firstly because of the unawareness of his or her own anger, and secondly because of that imaginary conversation that got derailed by your response.

Point #3: Marriage is about learning and growing. As your relationship gains more time, there are two possibilities. First, you may each hold the other accountable for damage done in the relationship, and stay hostage to what has already happened. Second, you may accept the fact that it is a learning process, and keep trying to change. As Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's said, "You are either green and growing or ripe and rotting."

Offer some space for your spouse. Accept that neither of you have done this perfectly, and try to accept your spouse. You may be asking: "why is this point in this section, not the previous section?" Well, it belongs in both sections, and I touched on it with the "everyone does the best they can where they are" speech. But when dealing with an angry person, I have found it best to see that person as doing the best he or she can. This helps me not get caught up in the emotions, allowing me to respond in more helpful ways.

So, accept that neither of you have been perfect, but both of you can grow and develop. And don't fall into the trap I see so often. Someone decides to try to make a change, and is met with the "we tried that before, and it didn't work," or even worse, "we've tried to change before, and we just can't." That is evidence not of reality, but of being caught in a stuck mindset. Growth is possible, and one of the ways to grow is by moving through difficult emotions, including anger and resentment.

Point #4: Almost always, the central issue is feeling heard and understood. The vast majority of skirmishes in a marriage are not about issues that need to be solved. They are about issues without solutions. Well, really one useful solution. That is about being heard. Remember that conversation that happens in your head that never occurs in real life? The reason that conversation is so good in your head is because you have someone listening and responding in ways that indicate that you were heard and understood.

Let's draw an important distinction, though, between someone understanding what I am saying and accepting it. I can always get to a point where I understand where someone is coming from. I can understand how they see the world. That does not mean that I accept it, just that I can see it. And fortunately, often what is needed is not acceptance but to be heard and understood.

Point #5: We all have a history that affects our anger patterns. Unfortunately, few of us had the opportunity to grow up in completely healthy

families. In fact, many grew up in quite dysfunctional families. This affects how we process anger in our adulthood. What we did not get in our families emotionally, how anger was addressed in our family, and what resources our parents had all impact how we deal with emotions in adulthood. And it affects what feels like a threat in our lives.

Remember Jenny and Sam? This is where they finally got some traction. Neither felt the other heard him/her. Both felt the other was trying to force his/her views on her/him. And that was the big logjam. Neither wanted to move until he or she felt heard. So both waited for the other to make a shift.

We worked together for some time, and in the end, both realized the other was listening. But more importantly, they also realized that they were dragging a long history into each argument. In fact, the history extended all the way back to the families they grew up in. When each was able to grasp not just what was being said, but where it came from, suddenly the anger evaporated. The hurt quickly dissipated, and they left clear of that “slippery slope.”

Will that be it for them? No. There will be other disagreements and arguments. Anger will emerge again. It always does. But hopefully, they will begin to get out of the habits of anger that have tainted their relationship. They will be clearer about the core pieces of hurt from each background. And they have some sense that the other person really does “get” them, even if it doesn’t feel like it right then.

Marriage gives us repeated opportunities to work through anger, both for our spouses and ourselves. We can either take advantage of the opportunities to find healing and growth. Or we can spend our lives butting heads with the person that can and should be our greatest ally. The option is in your court. Once you understand the biological and psychological realities to threat, hurt, and anger, you have the opportunity to change patterns that don’t work.

Anger can be an invitation to move closer. It can become the weapon to push apart. Really, the difference is in what approach you choose. I hope you will take the opportunity of anger to move toward each other, exploring the hurt and the threat. When that happens, our brain begins to understand the sense of threat as being incorrect. In other words, we begin to learn new patterns that help us feel less of a threat in the future. We decelerate the process. And we move toward intimacy.

Don’t let anger inflict damage in your relationship. Choose to understand differently, then choose to act differently. First comes a new way of understanding, then it is in your court to create new ways of relating based on that new understanding. Best wishes in your endeavor to create a more connected, more peaceful, and less conflicted relationship.