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*with Steve Halliday, PhD*

# FORGIVE TO LIVE

PART FIVE



FROM BITTER  
TO BETTER  
HOW TO MAKE ANGER  
WORK FOR YOU



Forgive to Live® Workbook

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## TEN PRINCIPLES OF FORGIVENESS

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*Forgiveness begins when you ...*

1. Accept that life is not fair and that others may play by a different set of rules than you do.
2. Stop blaming others for your circumstances.
3. Understand that you cannot change the person who hurt you; you can change only yourself.
4. Acknowledge the anger and hurt that some unpleasant event is causing you.
5. Re-frame your story of hurt—your “grievance story”—by placing the hurtful events in a broader context than your current point of view.
6. Recognise that only you can make the choice to forgive.
7. Shift your view of the offender as the one with all the power to seeing that person as weak and acting out of their own unresolved hurts and struggles.
8. Intentionally move from victim to victor as you begin to tap into your inner strengths and abilities.
9. Understand that forgiveness will take time and cannot be rushed.
10. Take responsibility for your life and your future.

*If you want to live, at some point you must choose to forgive.*



# FROM BITTER TO BETTER

*How to make  
anger work for you*





— CASE STUDY —

## Q *Peter's Story*

Peter didn't think of himself as an angry person. Sure, he could get upset—but only when provoked! Basically he was a nice guy who would give you the shirt off his back.

Peter worked three years at a menial job. Every time he thought of quitting, his boss asked him to stick it out a little longer, reminding Peter that when the company went public, all its employees would be eligible for stock options.

When the time came for his annual raise, Peter was told that the company had to show a profit in order to get top dollar when it went public, so he would not be getting a raise this year. "But don't worry about it," his boss told him, "because the stock options when we go public will be worth far more than a small raise in salary." So Peter stayed at the low-paying job he hated.

Then the day came when the company went public. Everyone in management received thousands of shares in the new company, but Peter and the other frontline workers received only fifty shares each, amounting to only about \$100 worth of stock.

Peter complained bitterly to his boss, who replied he could do nothing about the decision. The board of directors claimed that those in upper management should be rewarded the most because they had taken the greatest risks. This explanation did nothing to assuage Peter's anger and bitterness, so his boss fired him on the spot for insubordination.

Peter felt so angry that he thought long and hard about how to get back at the company in some destructive way.



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## 💡 WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

*Anyone can get angry— that is easy— but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy.*  
— Aristotle

When I think of anger, I recall the story of Goldilocks and the three bears; the porridge was either too hot, too cold, or just right. And so it is with anger. Anger that is too hot will boil over into rage. Anger that is too cold will settle into despair. And anger that is just right will express itself appropriately so the issue at hand can be addressed.





How do you handle your anger? When someone has wronged you, you may feel an overwhelming desire for revenge. We want life to be fair: “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” When life isn’t fair and we can do nothing about it, we get angry.

There is a good reason for our difficulty with anger. Most of us have not had many good experiences with either expressing our anger or being on the receiving end of another’s anger. You may have even been taught that anger is wrong. In fact, as a child, when you did express your anger, you may have been sent to your room and told not to come back until you could replace your anger with a pleasant attitude. At other times you may have observed a parent or relative explode with anger, and it scared you half to death. We simply have not had good role models on how to appropriately handle anger.

Given all the dangers associated with anger, you may wonder if anger is wrong. There is nothing wrong with the normal emotion of anger. The anger itself is not the problem, but rather how the anger is expressed and how long it is retained.

The purpose of any emotion is to inform you and call you to action. If you are angry, something is wrong and you need to do something about it. In this way, owning and being aware of your anger is beneficial. What is important to understand is that feelings follow thoughts. If you feel angry, pay careful attention to what you are thinking about. Then you can make a more informed decision on how to act.

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*We all boil at different degrees.*

*— Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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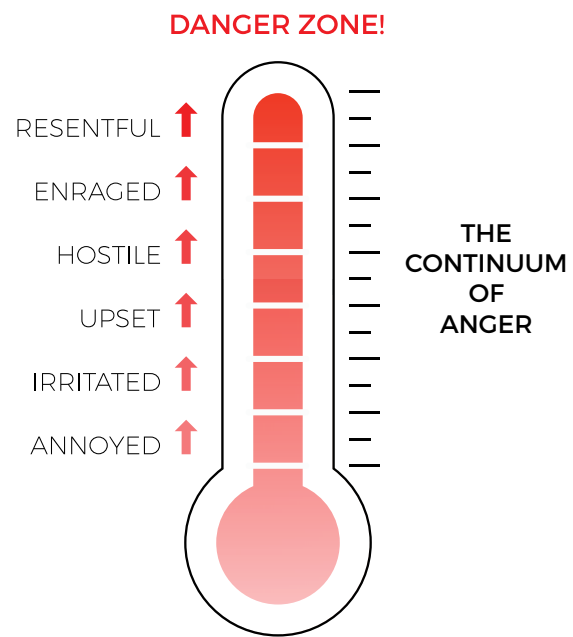
*It is one of the great mysteries of life: all of us know an angry person, but not one of us is an angry person.*

When I talk about anger, I am talking about a range of feelings that vary in intensity. Think of anger like a thermometer. At the coolest level you experience annoyance. You are aware that something is bothering you, but it is no big deal. As it gets hotter, you become irritated and feel motivated to do something to change the situation. If left unaddressed, irritation escalates the anger. And if not dealt with effectively, anger can boil over and become wild rage.

Anger can be a difficult emotion to recognise when it is yours. I make this point when presenting by asking the audience to raise their hands if they identify themselves as an angry person. Few, if any, hands ever go up. I then ask how many know someone who is angry, and almost every hand in the house goes up. If this is true, then angry people must be very popular, for everyone knows that angry person. But in fact, angry people are not popular. The simple truth is we see anger in others more easily than we see it in ourselves. Why? Here are three reasons:

1. We tend to justify our anger.
2. We assume the worst motives for others and the best motives for ourselves.
3. We are taught to believe that showing anger is wrong, so we simply hide it.

So what exactly is the most helpful way to express our anger?



Three basic choices exist.  
We express our anger:

- Passively—as revealed by such behaviours as ignoring, wishing, withdrawing, accommodating, and avoiding
- Aggressively—as revealed by such behaviours as attacking, forcing, criticising, controlling, and harming others
- Assertively—as revealed by such behaviours as confronting, being honest, stating expectations, and setting boundaries





If you want to express your anger most effectively, choose the assertive option. Assertiveness takes responsibility, not necessarily for what happened, but for what will happen in the future. Healthy assertiveness allows you to express to the people around you how you feel and what you expect without attacking them.

This approach carries the least risk of escalating the problem. Perhaps most important, dealing with your anger in an assertive way can pave the way for forgiveness, while passive and aggressive responses tend to make forgiveness more difficult.



If you have trouble admitting your anger, can you acknowledge that you've been hurt? Probably. So consider this fact: most experts consider anger a secondary response to hurt. We get angry when we feel hurt. In other words, anger is a signal alerting us to some hurt we've suffered, even if we can't immediately identify what that hurt might be. In this way, anger and hurt are two sides of the same coin. For most of us, one of the best ways to deal with our anger is to express our hurt. People tend to listen to hurt much more readily than they do to anger.

Our anger, therefore, can be a good thing. Its presence indicates that something has gone wrong and lets us know we need to deal with it. Anger also gives us the energy to confront a danger to our health or wellbeing. It can push us to clarify our real goals and to identify the obstacles that keep us from achieving those goals. Anger enables us to assert ourselves, and the result can be a greater sense of self-worth. Anger can also empower us to find a winning solution to a hurtful problem. And, if harnessed correctly, anger can lead to a spirited and rewarding life.



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*At the core of all anger is a need that is not being met.*

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*With forgiveness, your life is no longer defined by your past.*

In other words, you need to own your anger. It is yours and you need to deal with it. So often I hear the phrase, “You make me so angry,” as if my anger is someone else’s responsibility. When this happens, you are headed down the wrong pathway.

Let me illustrate this principle with the following diagram.







The path you choose will determine where you end up. Have you ever noticed that some people seem to be angry all the time? They are so full of anger that the slightest provocation seems to set them off. The truth is, no one can “store” anger. There is no pouch or container where it can reside. So why do some people get angry so quickly? While you cannot store anger, you can and do store memories. And if that memory is hurtful, the anger will come roaring back with that memory. Remember, feelings follow thoughts. So if you are constantly thinking about someone who has harmed you, your anger will always lie just below the surface, ready at a moment’s notice to come roaring out.

This leads to what I consider the most dangerous aspect of anger, and that is resentment. Resentment is the recalling of a grievance that has happened to you in the past. This recall brings back to the surface the anger attached to it. And the stronger the memory, the stronger the feeling associated with that memory. So to heal your emotions, you need to learn how to heal your memories. And let me assure you that time does not heal all wounds. Many wounds are never healed by time, but only by forgiveness.



The problem with resentment is that it destroys your emotional and physical health. That is why getting angry is less of a problem than remaining angry. Retained anger destroys your mental health because unexpressed anger can be one of the factors leading to depression. Retained anger destroys your relationships because people don't like to be around someone who is angry all the time. And retained anger destroys your physical health because anger releases powerful hormones into your system that can cause chronic health conditions such as hypertension, ulcers, headaches, joint pain, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic fatigue, and a host of other physical ailments. In fact, public health policies around the world recognise anger as a risk factor for heart disease. So understand, the anger you are retaining is killing you. Now ask yourself the question: is it worth holding on to?

Forgiveness begins with the recognition that you have been hurt, and the anger associated with it still resides in your memory and in the recollection of your grievance story. After all, if no one had been harmed, forgiveness would not be necessary.

So what do you do when you know in your head that you should forgive, but you are so full of hurt and anger that emotionally you simply cannot forgive? Recognise your feeling and then choose to forgive anyway. And if you are so emotionally overwhelmed that you simply cannot bring yourself to forgive, remind yourself that when the emotion subsides, you can come back to forgiveness.

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*Holding on to anger is a lot like holding on to a hot rock. As you clench it tightly in your fist, ready to hurl it at the person who did that awful thing to you, you are in fact hurting only yourself.*

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*Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be.*

— Thomas A Kempis

If your anger is too high, try these anger management ideas:

- Breathe deeply and slowly until you can regain control of your thoughts and feelings. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Think of your nasal passages like a radiator in your car. Your brain is cooled by passing the cooler, outside air through your nasal passages, which are right next to your frontal lobe. If your nasal passages get plugged, you quickly realise how beneficial they are to keeping everything open and flowing! This biological reality is also reflected in the language we use. When someone is angry, we call them a hothead, and if they are not, they are cool-headed. These word images actually describe what happens with the temperature of your brain.
- Exercise to expend some of the excess energy. The time it takes to exercise also buys you time to think about your options.
- Confront the situation and share how the other person's actions have impacted you.
- State as objectively as you can your point of view and be careful to use "I" statements rather than "you" statements. Say, for example, "I feel like I am not important to you when you come home late without letting me know," instead of, "You don't care one bit about me, or you would have called." "I" statements talk about what I need, not about what you must do for me.
- Use your energy to confront problems in order to change what you can. You could, for example, join a group around common concerns, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, to address larger concerns that affect society as a whole, such as drink driving.
- Being assertive means you are willing to set clear boundaries. If you say no, then mean it. Don't give in for the sake of peace when you know you will regret it afterward. When necessary, establish consequences, as this will reinforce that you mean what you say.
- Finally, learn to let go of those things you cannot change by practicing forgiveness, so you will have the strength and will to move on with your life.





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## REVIEWING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

*Learning from mistakes is good,  
but dwelling on them can stunt  
your growth.*

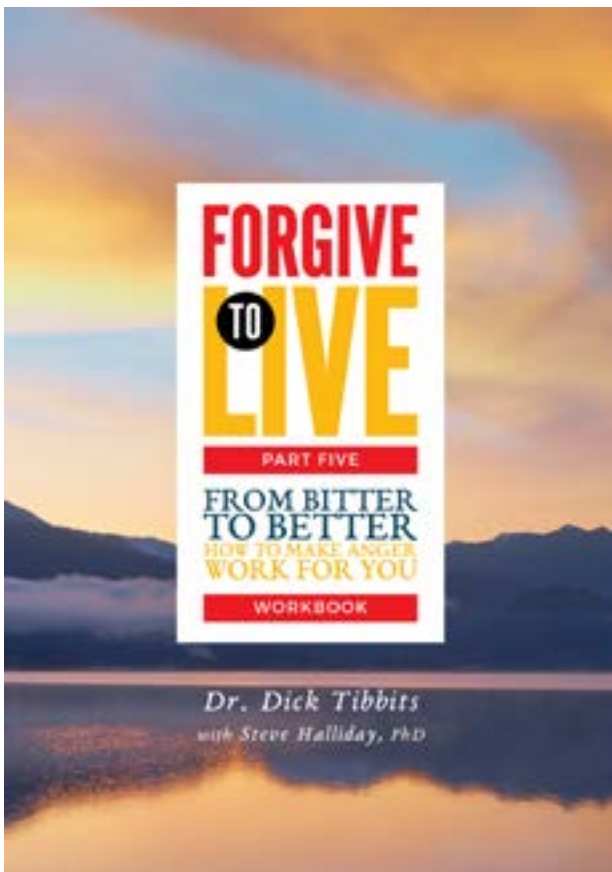
Peter was fortunate enough to have a friend who advised him to seek legal counsel before he acted out his fantasies of revenge. “Your former employer didn’t have to give you anything,” the lawyer told Peter, “since none of the promises were ever put into writing.”

These words made Peter even angrier than before. But as the conversation continued, the attorney did think Peter could pursue a case of wrongful dismissal.

1. What hurt has fueled Peter's anger? Is Peter's anger at his former employer justified? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Is Peter's pursuit of this issue in court consistent with forgiveness? Explain why or why not.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What could Peter do so his anger does not overwhelm him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What does Peter need to do to keep this situation from spawning a grievance story that could ruin his life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. There are three ways to express anger: passive, aggressive, and assertive. How do you think Peter is expressing his anger? What could he do to be assertive without going to passiveness or aggressiveness?

Thanks for completing these Review questions in Part 5 of the Forgive to Live booklet.

If you would like to discuss your Review answers with one of our Hope Channel Community Managers and/or continue your forgiveness journey by receiving Part 6, please email [discover@hopechannel.com](mailto:discover@hopechannel.com) or call 1300 300 389.



## FURTHER REFLECTION

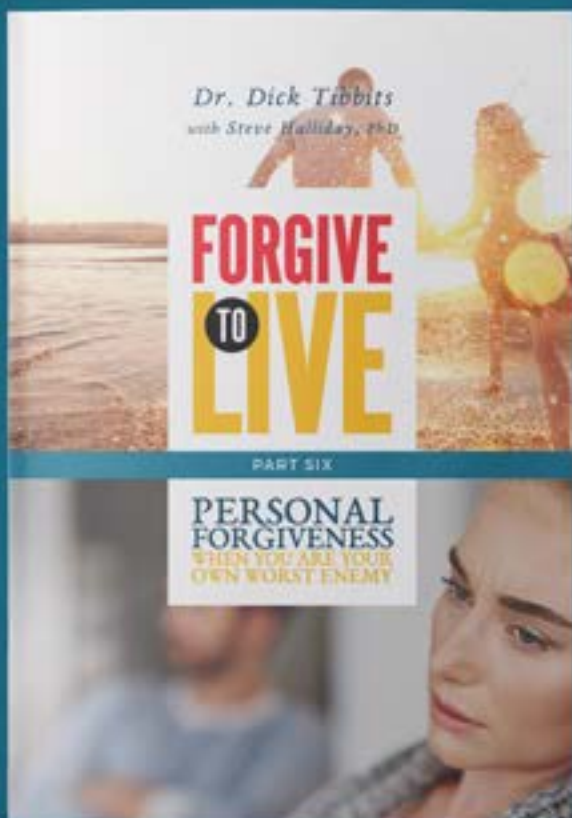
Throughout this topic, you've had the opportunity to reflect on a specific case study and understand more about how you are in control of how you react to situations.

By choosing to be assertive instead of aggressive or resentful, you can express your emotions and own your anger, instead of letting resentment or bitterness take over.

Through the accompanying workbook, you will now have the chance to take what you've just read and apply it to your own story so that you can experience the real difference forgiveness can make in your own life.

*The workbook is for your own personal use - and we encourage you to use it in order to get the most benefit from this series.*





## PART 6:

### PERSONAL FORGIVENESS

Forgiving yourself means letting go of what you are holding against yourself so that you can move on. Learn how to set yourself free from the past in Part 6, which concludes the Forgive to Live series. Email or call HopeChannel to receive your copy and to continue in your forgiveness journey.



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