



Church of God Ministries  
Spanish Fort, Alabama

December 26, 2025

### **Black Cat, Ladyfingers, and a Lesson Learned**

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast of lower Alabama. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

Back in the early 1970's I learned a valuable lesson one day. We didn't have a lot of money growing up, but around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July every year, one of my friends would usually come by and ask if I wanted "to light some Black Cats?" He had a gift for me. That was exciting to hear, and easy to answer.

Usually we only had Ladyfingers which were narrower and had less powder to ignite. But, a Black Cat, well that was about an inch and a half long, and much thicker. And, it was much louder.

The fuse usually took a few seconds to burn before the firecracker would ignite and blow up. One day, the pack that I had been given (about 16 in a pack) had a noticeable difference. Every one of the fuses was much shorter! No big deal, except short fuse, meant well, faster boom!

I think it was about the 4<sup>th</sup> firecracker that I unwound from the pack that when I lit the fuse with a punk as we called it, it simply went - lit, then before I could throw it, boom! It hurt so badly, I thought my fingers had been blown off!

After that, whenever I unwound a pack to have individual firecrackers, I always looked very carefully at the length of each fuse before lighting.

For those who follow the Gregorian calendar, in 5 days begins a new calendrical year. Many will make New Year's resolutions to try to change habits or ways of life. I recall someone mentioning that "I'm going to turn a new leaf and stop getting angry this year".

As mentioned last Sabbath evening, we'll now examine Scriptural instructions directed to any of us if we have a "quick or short fuse" and a have a tendency to get angry quickly. Some of us tend to become angrier more quickly than others.

You may have seen the "Snickers" commercials on TV where the catch phrase is "you are not you when you are hungry". A new word for me to learn was "Hangry". A combination or cross between hungry and angry.

When people get hungry, they make mistakes and they're not themselves – Snickers used this situation to claim they could prevent this from happening with its candy bar full of peanuts. Snickers' challenge was keeping its classic message, "You're not you when you're hungry," from getting old by relying on more than one form of storytelling.

In human interaction (and often in marriages) things erupt more often than they should. In society today we see more and more an attitude of anger instead of peace and stability.

Some will claim they have a right to be angry and unleash how they respond to situations. In the last years we have seen many who were angry cause harm and destroy without having any thoughts of doing anything wrong.

If we are honest, most of us have lost our temper or have let anger get the best of us at some time in our lives. There have been times in the past when I have let anger get to me such as when I smashed my finger while building something!

When I was a young boy I used to unleash some angry words when I was exasperated or frustrated. Because I was smaller than most kids, I was also picked on a lot. This caused me to develop a "short fuse", and willing to fight if needed. To survive in the schools I attended, I had to stand up to bullies. These experiences can be challenging and make room for habits to overcome and to bring under control.

Those who have suffered abuse will also often be on the defensive, and when becoming angry withdraw from contact with anyone perceived as a threat.

Those who suffer from chemical imbalances, as with blood sugar instability know what it is like to feel angry when levels drop.

If we have a problem with controlling our anger, we first have to admit that we have a problem. We have to see that letting our anger get out of control and resulting in saying or doing something that we regret is hurting us and may be hurting relationships with others.

If others see us unleashing an ugly display of anger, our reputation will be damaged and we may repel others and cause them to avoid us. There are a number of Scriptures that condemn a wrong display of anger. "*Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret-it only causes harm.*" (Psalm 37:8) How true. Harm comes from uncontrolled anger and wrath - sometimes serious harm. "*For as the churning of milk produces butter, and wringing the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife.*" (Proverbs 30:33).

We need to develop an awareness and sensitivity to how we are affecting others and when we are provoking anger in someone else. We need to back off and not precipitate an angry argument. The question arises, what is more important - winning an argument or being a peacemaker?

Here are several instructions from Proverbs. "*He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly.*" (Proverbs 14:29)

Similarly, "*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)

So, how do we develop the quality of being "slow to anger?"

First, if we are quick to anger we have to admit that. We then need to determine the triggers that set off our anger and be on guard to resist responding to them. Someone who is stressed often, or a good part of the time, will be more vulnerable to displaying anger. Some stresses can be eliminated and some can be reduced. Each one of us has to make choices and recognize what affects us.

When anger is triggered by a conflict with another person, the book of James gives some good advice. "*So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to*

*hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*" (James 1:19) This goes contrary to human nature and the usual dynamic, but one can make progress in developing new habits and moderating one's usual response. It takes time, practice, and humility. But, if we are damaging relationships and hurting people because of our giving in to anger, then it becomes a priority to make changes.

As human beings, we'll struggle to control the emotion of anger when it arises, but we can make effort in responding to the anger more appropriately. Notice the instructions from the apostle Paul. "*Be angry, and do not sin*": *do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.*" (Ephesians 4:26-27) If we do become angry we need to make the effort to resist the impulse to say or act on it inappropriately. We must choose our words and actions to be peacemakers - not war-makers. We must turn loose of the anger and not nurse it along into rage.

Some people pride themselves on their anger and ability to stir up strife. This is not the way of God. I remember having a friend when I was growing up that claimed "it's in my blood, my people, to be angry!" He blamed his anger on his nationality.

Jesus praised and complimented those who work to make peace. "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*" (Matthew 5:9)

Finally let me quote from the apostle Paul. "*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*" (Romans 12:18).

Living peaceably with all requires yielding to God's Spirit. That power, and of love, and a sound mind helps us become more like the Prince of Peace that lives within us. (Phil. 2:5).

So, that fuse, short as it was, reminded me for days after, as my hand still hurt, and still reminds me today, decades later, does my fuse burn quickly? If so, what is the result? Some thoughts to consider for us all.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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