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Santos, Narry F. *How God Works When our Temper and Tongue Are Out of Control*.
Quezon City, Philippines: Life-Change Publishing, Inc., 2003.

L I F E C H A N G E S E R I E S

HOW GOD WORKS

**When Our Temper & Tongue
Are Out Of Control**
(Lessons on Taming the Reckless Life)

Narry F. Santos


LIFECHANGE
Publishing, Inc.

How God Works

When Our Temper & Tongue Are Out Of Control

(Lessons on Taming the Reckless Life)

Published by LifeChange Publishing, Inc.
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Narry F. Santos, Ph D

International Standard Book Number:
971-92796-7-2 (Hard Cover)
971-92796-8-0 (Soft Cover)

Cover Design and Book Layout: Arnaldo G. Santos

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Printed in the Philippines

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The National Library of the Philippines CIP Data

Recommended entry:

Santos, Narry F.

How God works : when our temper & tongue
are out of control : lessons on taming the reckless
life / by Narry F. Santos. – Quezon City :
Lifechange Pub., c2003.

1 v

1. Temper. 2. Temperament – Religious
aspects. 3. Christian ethics. I. Title

BV4627.T4 291.568 2003 P034000786

ISBN 971-92796-8-0 (pbk.)

ISBN 971-92796-7-2 (pbd.)



To Hazel,
my gracious wife,
whose beauty radiates
from the inside out

To Eirene and Kaira,
our priceless children,
who bless us greatly
with peace and joy

To Sining,
my precious Nanay,
whose sacrificial love
I'll always treasure





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PREFACE



What you have in your hand is the third in a short series on the big topic, **How God Works**. The first book is called, “**How God Works When We are Worried and Weary**” (*Lessons on Restoring Rest to a Troubled Soul*) and the second book is titled, “**How God Works When We are Tried and Tempted**” (*Lessons on Overcoming Life’s Overwhelming Struggles*).

This last installment is called, “**How God Works When our Temper and Tongue are Out of Control**” (*Lessons on Taming the Reckless Life*).

As I mentioned in the preface of the first two books, the topic, “**How God Works,**” fascinates

me because I like to watch and learn how God works in and among us.

But I realize that I can't capture all the ways in which God works. In fact, the little that I can see cannot even accurately describe how God really works.

I also realize that I cannot put God and his ways in a box. For just as he is infinitely wise and creative, so he has countless ways of dealing with us and of making us discover him and his manifold ways.

As a pastor and Bible teacher for ten years now, I've seen the hand of God many times, and I would like to share these with you.

Some of these include the days when we feel worried and weary and when we go through various trials and temptations. I covered these in the first two books.

But aside from these, we can also see how God

works when we lose control of our temper and our tongue.

We know that God works in the highest moments of our life—when we feel emotionally up or spiritually encouraged, when we see many things work in us and for us, and when all things around us are under control and masterfully clear.

However, there’s something undeniably life-changing for us when we see and sense God work when life is hard and nothing seems to work out for us.

Just like the first two volumes, this third book in the **“How God Works”** series comes from a cluster of Wednesday sermons that I preached at the Greenhills Christian Fellowship South Metro during our midweek praise and prayer services and fellowships. For this current volume, I expanded two basic messages from two biblical passages.

Particularly, I have gained valuable insights on how we can tame our temper from James 1:19-20, and our tongue from James 4:11-12. Moreover, I included insights from key verses in the Book of Proverbs and the Letter to the Ephesians.

As we explore these short biblical passages in this small book, may we readily see how God works in our lives. May he also enable us to know and love him more, as we seek to manage our temper and tongue and tame the reckless life.





*“Your temper is one of
your most valuable possessions.*

Don't lose it.”

INTRODUCTION



The longer we are on earth, the more we discover that life is not as simple as we hoped it was. In one of my journal entries, I reflected on how God works and wrote:

“Life can be full of conflicts and complications. At times, God does not take these away, but teaches us to live through them. That’s when we learn that God did not promise us an easy life but a life lived by his grace.

“When we are tempted or have fallen into the temptation that life is meant to be easy, God intervenes and makes us know that life is hard. And when we know by heart that life is hard, we

are then ready to also learn that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

“At that time, he sometimes chooses to take away the conflict and even the complication of our present life. When he does, we are ready to recognize that what happened is God’s gift for us.

“Yet at times, he still does not take away the conflict and complication but instead gives us his strength, wisdom, and grace to see us through. Then we are ready to recognize that that, too, is God’s gift for us.

“In either case (whether he takes away the conflict and complication or not), we are able to thank God for his gift and give him the glory in making us stronger, wiser, and more gracious as followers of Christ.

“So at the end of the day, what really matters is not the presence or absence of life’s conflicts and complications. It’s being able to sleep with the

assurance that what we have gone through is part of God's design to know him better and to trust him more. In this assurance, we can rest."

I guess life's conflicts and complications are meant to make us know God better and to trust him more, especially when we don't understand what's happening or when we can't figure out what God is doing. Yet, through it all, God wants us to press on and to not give up, knowing that he will see us through.

In other words, the conflicts and complications in our lives are God's venues for us to know how he works. They are his conduits through which the floodgates of heaven's blessings flow. They are his channels through which our lives are filled to the brim.

So when we ask the question, "How does God work?" we can answer: God works by revealing himself in all our life's conflicts and complications.

God works by revealing himself through life's comforts and celebrations. He works by unfolding

who he is – in all his beauty and brightness, and with all his blessing and bounty – when success and joy cross our paths.

But just the same, he unveils who he is – in all his grace and glory, and with all his goodness and generosity – when conflicts and complications cross our paths to disturb our complacency.

In the first book, we discussed how God works in the midst of worry and weariness. In the second book, we described how he works when trials and temptations are in our midst. In the middle of all these, God works.

In this third book, we continue to declare that God works – even when our temper gives us a hard time and when our tongue is harsh on others.

Our temper and tongue are a lethal pair that can destroy anyone or anything that comes its way – if we don't know how to control them. The two are a deadly combination that can break the heart

and bruise the soul of many – if we do not discern how God works through them. They can destroy God’s work and delay his plans – if we do not determine what purposes they seek to fulfill in us.

Our temper and tongue can kill all of our hopes and can slay all of people’s dreams if we are ignorant of the ways that they operate on a daily basis. They can discourage our soul if we are unmindful of the disappointment they bring to us with their depressing onslaught on our spirit.

Thus, our undisciplined temper and unbridled tongue can make us feel that life is full of conflicts and complication. They can make us sense that our life is so out of hand, that we need to ask God to put his hand upon our reckless lives.

I wrote this small volume to make us see how God works when our temper and tongue need to be managed well. This volume seeks to help us learn lessons on taming our reckless life. Part 1 deals with the times when our temper is out of

control, while Part 2 discusses the times when our tongue is on the loose.

Part 1, “How God Works When our Temper Is Out of Control (Lessons on Taming our Temper),” has two chapters that cover my reflections on James 1:19-20. This short passage is loaded with powerful insights.

Chapter 1 (James 1:19a), “The Art of Listening More,” instructs us on how we can become good listeners. Chapter 2 (James 1:19b), talks about the ways which we can handle our speech well (“The Art of Talking Less.”) On the other hand, Chapter 3, “The Lost Art of Keeping our Cool,” incorporates how we can put our temper in check (James 1:19c-20).

Part 2, “How God Works When our Tongue Is on the Loose (Lessons on Tempering the Tongue),” contains two chapters on James 4:11-12.

Chapter 3, “Do Not Speak Against One Another.” tells us the first prohibition in tempering

the tongue (James 4:11a), while Chapter 4, “Do Not Judge One Another,” talks about the second prohibition to bridle our tongue (James 4:11b-12).

Like our approach in the first two books, all four chapters of this volume are designed to help us make practical steps for application. They intend to help us respond to God when he chooses to work in us at those times when our temper and tongue bring us trouble.

Before we go to Part 1, I’d like to issue a word to the wise: Temper and tongue management is a life-long process. While we are on earth, we will not be able to say, “My journey toward temper and tongue management is over.”

For some, the journey may be bumpy. For others, the journey may be smooth but at the end of the day, what matters is not the bumpy or smooth journey. It is that we complete the journey with God.

Let’s now turn to Part 1 and see how God works when our temper is out of control.



*“We have two ears and
one mouth, therefore, we
should listen twice as
much as we speak.”*

- Zeno, Ancient thinker & philosopher





Part 1

HOW GOD WORKS
When Our Temper is
Out of Control
(Lessons On Taming Our Temper)

*“^{19a}My dear brothers take
note of this: Everyone should be
quick to listen,…”*

-James 1:19a

Two husbands were talking about their wives. One husband said, “My wife talks to herself a lot.” Suddenly, the other husband’s eyes brightened, and he quickly replied, “My wife, too. She talks a lot to herself, but she doesn’t know it. She thinks I’m listening.”

No wonder, some wives nag or get angry – for their husbands do not listen. No wonder, some husbands do not listen or get angry – for their wives nag.

It’s interesting to see how listening, talking, and getting angry closely relate to one another. One directly affects the other two. When we do not listen, we get in trouble with our words – which leads to our getting angry with others or to others getting angry with us.

On the other hand, when we listen well, what we say makes sense and anger is not at all in sight. So if we are to learn how to deal with our anger (especially when it seems out of

control), we need to also learn how to listen and talk well.

In Part 1, our main concern is to answer the question, “How do we handle our temper when it is out of control?” James 1:19-20 offers us three practical answers. First, we are called to listen more (1:19a). Second, we are commanded to talk less (1:19b). Third, we are commissioned to keep our cool (1:19c-20).

Let’s now see how to deal with our temper head-on.

CHAPTER 1

The Art of Listening More

(James 1:19a)



Listen more. Talk less.

These words are simple and easy for us to understand, yet they can be complicated and hard for us to apply. This difficulty surfaces during our unguarded moments – when we are provoked.

At those times, we tend to listen less and talk more. We may resist listening to others but at the same time insist that they listen to us. We may desire to just keep on talking, in the same way that others may desire to do the same.

Things can even get nasty. When we don't get hold of ourselves, we may simply be talking at

the same time – with no one listening to what is being said and with no one seeking to understand the hurts behind the words. Verbal abuse – if not physical abuse – takes charge. And after all the talking and hurting have been done, what's ironic is that we may never want to talk with these people again.

But things turn nastiest when we talk to other people who have nothing to do with the fight and who can do nothing about it. In our effort to vent, we may end up violating and hurting others more.

And when those who listen to us with willing ears talk more to still others, then rumors may spread. As this goes on, so does the violation of more people.

Given these scary scenarios, we can say that to listen more and talk less – though badly needed – are easier said than done. We can say this maybe because we remember the times (or lost count of

the times) when we blew our top, or when others blew theirs.

We can probably look back with regret at those moments when we should have known better – when we should have kept our cool, instead of releasing our rage. We can probably recall with sadness those moments when we wished that we simply listened more and talked less.

But my friend, not all is lost. We can learn and resolve not to return to that destructive route of sadness. To be able to do that, we need a better road map to guide our way in handling our temper well.



We can probably recall with sadness those moments when we wished that we simply listened more and talked less.



Three-fold Progression in Temper Management

James 1:19-20 offers us that better road map. In the previous context of this passage, James

addresses the issues of handling trials (1:1-12) and temptations (1:13-18), which I both discussed in the second volume of this series.

In our current passage, James hits home real hard with these words, “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (1:19). Temper management succeeds when we are involved in three things: (1) quickness in listening; (2) thoughtfulness in speaking; and (3) slowness in getting angry.

Let’s note the progression. We listen first. We speak thoughtfully next. Then we can be slow to anger last.

Holding our anger comes third in a three-part progression that starts with listening more and continues with speaking less. Temper management does not happen when only the “listening-more” part is present, or when the “speaking-less” portion is there. It occurs only

when both listening more and speaking less form part of the equation.

Strategic Role of God's Word

Before we spell out what the three brief commands mean and involve, we will do well to check the verses immediately before and after our passage. In this way, we can discover an important tool to implement temper management. Let's breeze through the following verses, zeroing in on the role of God's Word:

- (1) "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth" (1:18a);
- (2) "Therefore... humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you" (1:21b);
- (3) "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (1:22); and

- (4) “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like” (1:23).

Looking at these verses, we see that to deal with our anger, we need to have an attitude that accepts the value of the “word of truth,” which must be planted in us. Moreover, we need not simply be listeners of the word, but also doers of it.

*Moreover, we
need not simply
be listeners of the
word, but also
doers of it.*

A man was walking in a desert when suddenly a voice from heaven told him, “Pick up some pebbles and put them in your pocket, and tomorrow you will be both glad and sorry.” Upon hearing those words, the man obeyed. He stooped down and picked up a handful of pebbles and put them in his pocket.

The next morning, he reached into his pocket

and found diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. He was both glad and sorry. He was glad that he had taken some pebbles, and sorry that he didn't take more.

So it is with God's Word. If we want to gladly discover more precious gems of truth, we need to know and accept it. If we don't want to be sorry and miss out the wealth of wisdom it offers, we need to apply it.

One of the key truths that we are called to know and apply is the staccato-like statement: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (1:19).

Quickness in Listening

Let's seek to understand these three commands, beginning with the first one: "Everyone should be quick to listen" (1:19a). What does it mean to be "quick to listen"? It

means to be eager, focused, and attentive, ready to receive and assimilate the message heard, thus, the expression, “all ears.” It requires more than hearing what is said; it demands wanting to hear what is said.

On one school day, a teacher caught his grade five student daydreaming. So she asked the student, “Do you have trouble hearing?” The student replied, “No, Teacher. I have trouble listening.”

I wonder if we have trouble hearing or listening. To check if we do, let’s ask ourselves these questions:

- (1) Are we skilled in listening or do we not know how to listen well?
- (2) Do we have the desire to hear what people have to say or would we rather not hear them?

- (3) When people talk with us, are we actually “all ears” to them or not?

Our answers to these three questions reveal whether we have good listening habits or not. But before we learn the good listening habits, let’s first see the poor ones and check which bad listening habits afflict us.

Four Poor Listening Habits

As I name and briefly describe each of them, I’d like for us to assess if we find ourselves showing any of them.

The first poor listening habit is called “**pseudo**” listening or “fake” listening. We call it such because we pretend that we’re listening to people, but in reality, we’re not.

It usually happens when husbands “listen” to their wives talk, while the husbands read the

newspaper. It also happens when parents “listen” to their child, while the parents watch the TV.

The second is called “**selective**” listening. We call it “selective,” because we tune in only when the topic of conversation interests us.

For example, we are all ears only when the topic is about our favorite sports, songs, movie personalities, or interests. For other topics, we show “token” interest only.

The third is called “**protective**” listening which happens when we tune others out because the topic of conversation is about our faults or frailties.

When our youngest child, Kaira, was only five years old, she was sensitive to hearing anything embarrassing about her. On one occasion, we started discussing an event that happened in school that day. Since she found that embarrassing, she literally covered her ears with her hands.

There are some instances in my life when I feel that way, too – when I don't feel like hearing people's comments, critiques, and criticisms about me. But I realize that those are the words I need to hear in order for me to grow and mature.

The fourth poor listening habit is called “**shallow**” listening. We call it “shallow,” because we only get the minor point and miss the major point in what people are saying. We grasp the superficial or side issues, but not the core.

In the early part of my marriage, I was often guilty of “shallow” listening. This kind of listening occurred during my conflicts with my wife, Hazel. At those times, I would quickly apologize, and Hazel would ask me what I was sorry for.

After giving my answer, I'd observe Hazel becoming more disappointed. She would say, “That's not the reason why I'm upset with you.” To my shame, she had to spell out why she cried or felt hurt.

Assessing our Listening Habits

In your case, which poor listening habit or habits have you acquired? Do you struggle with “fake” listening – pretending to listen but are really preoccupied with something or someone else in your mind? Are we plagued with “selective” listening – tuning people out at will? Is “protective” listening our hindrance to being all ears to others? Are we prone to engage in “shallow” listening – focusing on the non-essentials but missing the essence of what people say?

Whatever habit or combination of habits blocks us from listening to others well, we need not despair. We can choose to change these habits (no matter how ingrained they might have been), in obedience to the command in God’s Word: “Everyone should be quick to listen.”

Letting Go of Poor Listening Habits

How do we turn these poor listening habits into good ones.

First, we can part ways with “fake” listening, by giving our undivided attention in the conversation. We can drop the newspaper, turn off the TV, and be “all ears” to the person with whom we are talking. When our mind is tempted to stray or drift, we need to quickly bring our mind back on track.

Second, we can let go of “selective” listening, by choosing to listen to the interests of others. This choice does not only help us become true listeners, it also develops us as teachable learners. Learning from others’ interests widens our world and makes us more interesting conversationalists.



“When our mind is tempted to stray or drift, we need to quickly bring our mind back on track.”



Third, we can do away with “protective” listening, by seeking to benefit from people’s comments and criticisms about us however humbling these comments might be. Remember: humility is good for us.

“We can do away with ‘protective’ listening, by seeking to benefit from people’s comments and criticisms about us however humbling these comments might be.”

Here are three proverbs that can help us gain wisdom in criticisms, especially if they come from friends:

- (1) “Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice” (Proverbs 13:10);
- (2) “Better is open rebuke than hidden love” (Proverbs 27:5); and
- (3) “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (Proverbs 27:6).

Criticism or “open rebuke,” especially from a “trusted friend,” adds value to our life. It may hurt us, but it makes us wiser. It may emotionally sting, but it keeps us from morally stinking and spiritually sinking.

Fourth, we can turn away from “shallow” listening by seeking to understand others. We can focus on what their words mean to them and not so much on what those words mean to us. If we don’t understand what they mean, we can clarify it with them. The effort to clarify can guard us from jumping into wrong conclusions and from being judgmental of others.



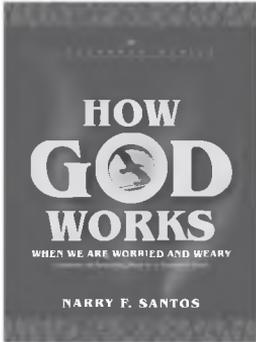
The effort to clarify can guard us from jumping into wrong conclusions and from being judgmental of others.

So far, we have learned that in order to handle our temper well, we need to listen more. As the saying goes, “He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame” (Proverbs 18:13).

In the next chapter, we will explore how to actually talk less, so that we get angry less.

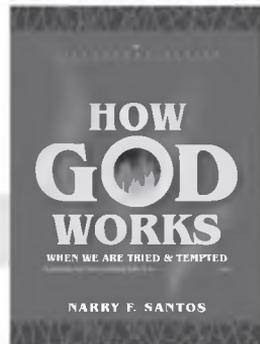


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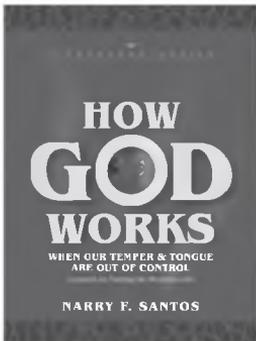
ISBN 971-92796-2-1 (pbk.)

ISBN 971-92796-3-X (pbd.)



ISBN 971-92796-5-6 (pbk.)

ISBN 971-92796-6-4 (pbd.)



ISBN 971-92796-8-0 (pbk.)

ISBN 971-92796-7-2 (pbd.)

*T*his book calls on us to take a fresh look at the dynamics of hiya with one eye on our cultural context and with the other eye on the biblical content. Looking at both culture and Christianity in perspective will not only help us to see the honor in hiya, but will also transform us to walk with honor – in the same way that Jesus turned his shameful death into something honorable.

ISBN 971-92796-1-3 (pbd.)

ISBN 971-92796-0-5 (pbk.)



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PLEASE CONTACT US AT:



96-B Panay Avenue, Brgy. South Triangle
Quezon City 1103, Philippines
Telephone: (632) 374-5996 • Fax: (632) 374-5997
E-mail: lifecchange@i-manila.com.ph