

# Angry at God? If so, you're not alone, says psychologist

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The notion of being angry with God goes back to ancient days. Such personal struggles are not new, but Case Western Reserve University psychologist Julie Exline began looking at "anger at God" in a new way.

"Many people experience [anger](#) toward [God](#)," Exline explains. "Even people who deeply love and respect God can become angry. Just as people become upset or angry with others, including loved ones, they can also become angry with God."

Exline, an associate professor in Case Western Reserve's College of Arts and Sciences, has researched anger toward God over the past decade, conducting studies with hundreds of people, including college students, [cancer survivors](#) and grief-stricken family members.

She and her colleagues report their results in the article, "Anger toward God: Social-Cognitive Predictors, Prevalence, and Links with Adjustment to Bereavement and Cancer" in the new issue of the [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#).

Anger toward God often coincides with deaths, illnesses, accidents or [natural disasters](#). Yet anger is not limited to traumatic situations. It can also surface when people experience personal disappointments, failures, or interpersonal hurts. Some people see God as ultimately responsible for such events, and they become angry when they see God's intentions as cruel or uncaring. They might think that God abandoned, betrayed, or mistreated them, Exline says.

Exline notes that it can be difficult for people to acknowledge their anger toward God. Many people are ashamed and don't want to admit their feelings, she says. In particular, people who are highly religious may believe that they should focus only on the positive side of religious life.

"But religion and spirituality are like other domains of life, such as work and relationships," Exline says. "They bring important benefits, but they can bring difficulties as well. Anger with God is one of those struggles," she adds.

According to Exline's findings, Protestants, African Americans, and older people tend to report less anger at God; people who do not believe in God may still harbor anger; and anger toward God is most distressing when it is frequent, intense, or chronic.

Overcoming anger at God, she says, may require some of the same steps needed to resolve other anger issues.

"People may benefit from reflecting more closely on the situation and how they see God's role in it," Exline suggests. "For example, they may become less angry if they decide that God was not actually responsible for the upsetting event, or if they can see how God has brought some meaning or benefit from a painful situation."

People who feel angry toward God also need to be reassured that they are not alone. Many individuals experience such struggles, she adds. She suggests that people try to be open and honest with God about their anger, rather than pulling away or trying to cover up their negative feelings.

**More information:** [psychology.case.edu/research/god/index.html](https://psychology.case.edu/research/god/index.html)

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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