

Are You Mad at God? Just Admit It.

Have you ever been mad at God? If so, you are not alone.

Many people over the ages have struggled with anger against the Father. Now, a new study out of Case Western Reserve University is exploring this anger in a new light.

“Many people experience anger toward God,” says Julie Exline, an associate professor in Case Western Reserve’s College of Arts and Sciences. “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 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.

What Exline and her colleagues have found is that 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.

According to Exline’s research, 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.”

Exline’s findings show that 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, and 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.

Have you ever been mad at God? How did you deal with it? I’d love to hear your experience in the comment box below.