

# ***HOW NOT TO . . . PROVOKE YOUR CHILD TO ANGER***

Workshop by Doreen Claggett

*"... provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Colossians 3:21).*

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**INTRODUCTION.** Good morning! Welcome to this session entitled: "HOW NOT TO PROVOKE YOUR CHILD TO ANGER." It is my fervent prayer that God will greatly bless our time together.

A. You see, the subject of anger isn't a popular topic to address. For example, a few days ago I asked one of my daughters to read over this workshop and make suggestions. However, she said: "Not NOW, Mom. I'm too MAD at the moment. The kids have been really B-A-A-D this morning."

1. Normally, having a struggle with anger isn't something anyone likes to admit. Yet, the problem appears to be epidemic — even in Christian homes.

a. For example, Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Life Principles reports asking 10,000 men across this country if they had a problem with anger; 95% confessed that they did.<sup>1</sup>

b. When teaching seminars and homeschooling retreats, I've asked the same question of mothers. The percentage was about the same.

c. This is becoming more and more true of children as well.

2. According to Chapman and Campbell, in the *five Love Languages of Children*:

**... the primary lifetime threat to your child is his or her own anger. If your child does not handle his own anger well, it will damage or destroy him. The mishandling of anger is related to every present and future problem your child may have — from poor grades to damaged relationships to possible suicide. It is imperative that you do all you can to safeguard your child now and in the future.**<sup>2</sup>

3. Because fathers think "mechanically" more than "relationally," God knows that anger is a special temptation for dads. He thus warns:

**"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."**

- "Bring them up" means "to nourish, to provide for with tender care."<sup>3</sup>
- The word "nurture" can be translated as "training." The great reformed Bible teacher, William Hendriksen, states that:

"this word [training] is neat; it may be described as having training by means of rules and regulations, rewards, and when necessary, punishments. It refers primarily to what is done to the child."

He went on to say that "by contrast, this word [admonition] means `training by means of the spoken word, whether that be teaching, warning, or encouragement. It refers primarily to what is said to the child.'"<sup>4</sup>

- a. In GROWING DADS GOD'S WAY, Dr. John Barnett explains:

"Training is what we *do*; admonition is what we *say*."

He continues: "Fathers have to be actively involved in doing, and shaping their children's lives, as well as speaking — surrounding them with godly words."<sup>5</sup>

- b. When this is not the spirit of fatherhood, receptivity to child training is seriously weakened. Furthermore, God says that children who have an *angry* father will become discouraged (Col. 3:21).

(1) Mothers will too because what happens to our children happens to US.

(2) We *feel* it — just as if it WAS happening to us.

- 4. As nurturers, who think relationally, mothers naturally are more sensitive to their children's spirits.

- a. However, because we are also very emotional beings, we likewise are regularly confronted with situations in which we can easily provoke our children to anger — or BE provoked.

- b. Especially homeschooling moms who have the care of children 24 hours a day. Let's face it, kids can be very TRYING at times, can't they?

**B. "Did you know that anger is a motivator?"**

In *Winning over Your Emotions*, author H. Norman Wright points out that anger:

**"... can motivate you to hate, wound, damage, annihilate, despise, scorn, loathe, vilify, curse, ruin, and demolish. When we're angry we might ridicule, get even with, laugh at, humiliate, shame, criticize, bawl out, fight, crush, offend, or bully another person. All of these do very little to build relationships."**<sup>6</sup>

1. Think of the damaged relationships with our children if such actions are vented on *them!*
  - a. They have no way to defend themselves.
  - b. Instead, children just absorb such meanness right into their little spirits. And then **THEY** become angry.
  - c. So the cycle perpetuates itself because anger begets anger.
2. To safeguard our children's future, a good starting place is to make sure that we are part of the **SOLUTION** and not part of the **PROBLEM**.
  - a. Therefore, we're going to first look at twenty ways that parents commonly provoke children to anger and how to avoid these pitfalls.
  - b. After that, we'll look at some suggestions for defusing parental anger plus how to help children manage anger.

## **I. TWENTY COMMON WAYS PARENTS PROVOKE CHILDREN TO ANGER**

A. The Anger of Man Does Not Produce the Righteousness of God (James 1:20).

1. Modeling anger. (Prov. 22:24-25)

- a. If we consistently respond to difficulties with anger, so will our children.

Consider this example:

**OVERHEAD: "And ANOTHER thing . . ."**

God says: **"Make no friendship with an angry man [or woman]; and with a furious man [or woman] thou shalt not go: Lest thou**

**learn his [or her] ways, and get a snare to thy soul" (Proverbs 22:24-25).**

- b. For every time that we become sinfully angry with one of our children, we add another brick to the emotional wall that can build between us.
    - If the wall becomes big enough, it will hamper a child's ability to hear and receive training.
    - In other words, the child reasons: "What you *are* speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you *say*."
2. Not having marital harmony. (Gen. 2:24 [Repeated 4 times in Bible]; Heb. 12:15)
- a. When a husband and wife violate God's command to become "one flesh," this leads to all sorts of disharmony within the whole family.
  - b. Arguing with our spouse in front of the children is a classic example of marital disharmony.

**OVERHEAD:**

God says: "**Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled . . .**" (Hebrews 12:14-15).

- Disagreements between spouses are best discussed in private, using biblical principles to peacefully resolve differences.
  - If we don't, then the "many" that are defiled through bitterness will certainly include Christ's lambs.
- c. A second example of marital disharmony is reversing God-given roles. (Eph. 5:22-24; Gen. 3:16)
- (1) From the time of Eve, it's been natural for wives to want control over *husbands*. But that's not God's way.
    - HIS best is that we resist the desire to control by sweetly yielding to our husband's God-given authority over us.

- (2) Dads can create marital disharmony by abdicating their leadership roles, forcing moms to carry responsibilities God didn't intend them to bear.
  - (3) Or, a dad who hates confrontation may promote role reversals by simply LETTING his wife "wear the pants in the family."
  - (4) Children aren't dummies. They sense when something isn't right but they don't know how to handle it. Often, they end up repeating the same cycle in their own marriages.
- d. A fourth example of marital disharmony is failing to agree on biblical standards of behavior and how to correct disobediences.
- (1) Usually, one is overly strict; the other overly lenient to make up for the strictness.
    - To create balance, the uptight spouse needs to lighten up while the permissive partner should toughen up.
  - (2) It's healthiest to establish simple rules together, which are comprised of:
    - Non-negotiables made up of Biblical commands (no lying, cheating, stealing, hitting, etc.)
    - House rules rooted in biblical principles (ex. orderliness — close the outside doors, take off muddy shoes, keep your room clean, if you get something out, put it away).
3. Having double standards. (Matt. 23:1-4, 23-24, 28; Phil. 4:9; James 1:17, 22; Matt. 5:37; Col. 3:9)
- a. This is the typical Bible Club president who by actions conveys: "Do as I SAY — not as I DO." Whenever the spouse or children fall short, this Bible Club president "clubs" them with Scriptures.
    - Being only a "hearer" of the Word while requiring others to perform according to OUR standards is Phariseeism, which our Lord hates because:

**". . . ye . . . outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matt. 23:28).**

Consider this example of hypocrisy: Our pastor recently spoke to a group of young marrieds. He gave this example of hypocrisy.

If you are yelling at your kids on the way to church, then wave and smile at people in the parking lot, the kids will resent such hypocrisy. So you should either START yelling at the people at church — or STOP yelling at your kids.

- God's way: **"Those things, which ye have both learned and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:9).**

c. Another example of double standards is the failure to be impartial, having different rules for different children (showing favoritism).

**". . . the wisdom that is from above is . . . without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).**

d. Failing to keep promises, but requiring such from children, is another example of double standards. (Matt. 5:37; Col. 3:9)

God says: **"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds . . ." (Col. 3:9).**

- It's nearly impossible to teach our children to be truthful and dependable if we don't first set a godly example.

4. Not taking time to talk with them. (Eph. 5:15-16; Eccl. 3:1)

God says: **"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16).**

a. If we neglect talking with them, how will we get to KNOW them? Their joys, fears, desires, friends.

- And how then can we obey God's command in Deuteronomy 6 to TALK about His Word and ways every waking moment?

- b. From toddlerhood, we need to be attentive when they're speaking to us.

**Example:** After my daughter, Lynda, and I returned from teaching a Homeschooling Mother's Retreat, her 8-year-old daughter wanted to present her OWN seminar. Victoria called it: "A Kids' Seminar for Parents." She shared these points:

- (1) Listen to your children; what they have to say is *important* to them! (She reasoned: "Grownups always want to interrupt you by saying what THEY think while a child just wants to talk and have YOU listen.)
- (2) Don't "burst your child's bubble" by making him throw away something he considers a treasure.
- (3) Don't reject what your child wants to share with you — like a beautiful flower — or even an interesting looking bug (no "Yuk's! allowed).

5. Neglecting child's physical needs. (Phil. 2:3-4, Titus 2:4-5)

God says: "**. . . in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things but every man also on the things of others"** (Phil. 2:4).

- The disciple's heart should be one of service through providing nutritious meals, a well-ordered home, proper clothing, physical touch - plenty of hugs, kisses, etc.

6. Giving too much freedom. (Prov. 29:15; Gal. 4:1-2)

God says: "**The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame"** (Prov. 29:15).

- a. Children require constant supervision because "Idle hands *are* the devil's workshop."
- b. We ought to KNOW who they're with and what they're doing. Then, when sin rears its ugly head, we're in a position to correct it on the spot.

Example: For times when little kids are playing indoors, keep them near by. A good technique is to get a large armoire for your main living area. Then organize kids' puzzles, books, games, toys, etc. in the armoire. As the kids are playing, you can have regular attitude checks. And, small pieces don't get lost because you're there to enforce clean-ups before getting something else out.

- c. If we give children too much freedom, and are thus unaware of what they're doing, this can create insecurities — and eventually anger — because they'll feel that we just don't care about them.

7. Being overly strict. (James 3:17)

God says: ". . . **the wisdom that is from above is . . . peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, . . .**" (James 3:17).

- a. As parents, we NEED God's wisdom to find the proper balance between extending too much freedom and not enough.
- b. The amount and type of freedoms should be in direct relationship to the degree of trustworthiness shown by our children. (This is especially true during the teaching facet of child training between ages 13-20.)
- c. Failure to be sensitive in this area can frustrate them. They may even quit trying to earn freedom -- just TAKE it on their own.

8. Having unrealistic expectations. (1 Cor. 13:11, 10:13)

God says: "**When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things**" (1 Cor. 13:11).

- a. Let's face it; children WILL be children. They speak, reason, and think childishly.
  - For example, do you know that for only *50 cents* sisters are willing to dunk their heads in a barrel of manure water?
  - And . . . do you know that siblings consider it FUN to see who can let the dog lick their teeth the longest?

- And . . . do you KNOW how many runs can occur while "Panty Hose Man" wears Mom's new panty hose over his head while chasing his sisters around the house?
- b. My point is this. We shouldn't EXPECT little children to act and think like adults. So we shouldn't be surprised when our kids ACT like kids. Lightening up and keeping a sense of humor is so important!
  - c. For the IMPORTANT stuff — like spiritual, moral, and academic training — we need to make sure that what we ASK of children is something which their current capabilities allows.

Example: Joey, age one: "You've got until the count of THREE to stop that tantrum!" (He couldn't count yet!)

- God doesn't ask more of us than we can handle. (1 Cor 10:13). Neither should we of our children.
  - Unrealistic expectations leads to *unfulfilled* expectations which then provokes anger in parents and children alike.
9. Comparing them to others. (II Cor. 10:12)
    - a. Comparing one child with another is natural. Especially when you have a mixture of compliant and strong-willed children. However, comparisons aren't wise.

Consider this common example.

**OVERHEAD: "Why can't you be like your SISTER?"**

God says: "**For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise**" (2 Corinthians 10:12).

- b. Comparing one child with another can create lifelong feelings of inferiority in the one being negatively compared and excessive pride in the favored child.

c. A major parenting goal should be to train our children to compare themselves with GOD's standards alone.

10. Discussing a child's weaknesses and struggles with others, especially while in his presence. (Titus 3:2, Prov. 22:1)

God says: **"Speak evil of no one. . . . A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Titus 3:2, Prov. 22:1).**

a. Telling tales about our children is gossip. When it's in their presence, we're being thoughtless and insensitive.

Principle: If the person you're talking to isn't part of the problem, or part of the solution, don't discuss it.

b. Parents, children will live up to what they PERCEIVE we think of them, whether it's positive OR negative.

God's way: **". . . if a [child] be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness: considering thyself lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1)**

11. Not praising them. (Prov. 25:11, 27:2)

God says: **"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Prov. 25:11).**

a. Oh, how important it is that we encourage our children with the "Atta boys!" or "Atta girls!"

b. Praising faithfully for what they're doing RIGHT is like a spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine of biblical correction go down lots better!

12. Having a critical spirit. (Matt. 7:1-5, 2 Cor. 3:6)

a. Critical persons are more than likely products of constant criticism growing up. They tend to be eternal pessimists who generate long lists of "do's" and "don'ts" according to their own standards of behavior.

Living like that snuffs the joy out of life. For God says:

**"the letter [of the law] killeth, but the spirit [of the law] giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6).**

- b. Having been constantly compared to my sister when growing up, for a time I struggled with pessimism and a critical spirit myself. But God was merciful. He renewed my mind and heart through meditating on His Word — especially Chapter 4 of Philippians. What great content! Consider these treasures:

V. 4: Rejoice in the Lord always!

V. 5: Let your moderation be known to all.

V. 6: Be careful for nothing.

V. 7: The peace of God shall keep your heart and mind through Christ.

V. 8: Meditate on the "whatsoevers" (true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report).

V. 9: Learn to be content in whatever circumstance you're in.

V. 10: You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

V. 19: My God shall supply ALL your need.

- Through Christ, we CAN forsake pessimism and a critical spirit and replace it with *thankfulness* as we yield to God's will in all things.

13. Scolding, especially in front of others. (Matt. 18:15; John 21:15-17)

God says: ". . . if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: . . ." (Matt. 18:15).

- a. The first instinct for most Christians is to apply this verse to a believer outside their immediate family.

- b. However, this principle also applies to family members who, as believers, are brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - c. God's way is to lovingly administer biblical correction in private. (Under certain circumstances, a public rebuke may be in order. But this is not the norm.)
14. Making fun of them (Job 17:1-2) or calling them names (Eph. 4:29).
- a. Consider this example of making fun of a child.

**OVERHEAD: "Boo hoo ... boo hoo ..."**

The youngster's toy is broken. So he's appealing to his dad for comfort and repair of the toy. Yet, the dad just mocks his child's tears.

- In doing so, perhaps this dad thinks he's helping his son be MACHO, or TOUGH.
- In this instance, however, mockery is likely to crush his son's spirit. A better way is to show compassion by putting an arm around his shoulder and offering to try to fix the toy. (One of the most outstanding qualities of Christ's life is His compassion!)
- There will be plenty of times later on to teach how to handle disappointment well — when it really MATTERS.

God says: **"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).**

- b. Another form of "corrupt communication" is to call a child unkind names — especially related to characteristics over which a child has no control.
  - Being a former Kindergarten Director, I can't resist saying: "If you don't have anything NICE to say, don't say anything at all!"
  - Really, though, if we as adults applied this simple guideline

to our own lives, there would be a lot less offenses going on!

15. Not listening to their opinion or their side of the story. (Prov. 18:13,17)

God says: **"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13).**

- a. We can really blow it big time if we overreact and hastily discipline an innocent child.

Example: A statement like this won't make him feel any better: "Well, maybe you ARE innocent — so just consider us even for things you DIDN'T get caught doing!"

- b. Get the facts first. Sometimes new light may change the way we choose to handle something. And, this provides a training opportunity when a child expresses an unbiblical viewpoint.
- c. Remember: Discipline is to righteously equip children for the FUTURE — not be punitive for the present.

16. Consistently disciplining in anger. (Psa. 6:1; 38:1; James 1:19-20; Eph. 4:26-27)

God says: **". . . the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).**

- a. Author H. Norman Wright gives good examples for this verse:

**"Why do you become angry at your family members when they don't respond to you? Why do you get angry at the kids when they don't pick up their room, mow the lawn, or dry the dishes properly? Anger expressed by yelling at a son who does not mow the lawn carefully does not teach him how to do it correctly. Angry words directed to a sloppy daughter do not teach her how to be neat. Step-by-step instruction (even if it has been given before) can help solve the problem."<sup>7</sup>**

- b. When we first start to get angry, we ought to examine our motives: "Am I angry because of an offense against ME — or an offense against GOD?"
- c. Biblical discipline should always be for the benefit of the CHILD —

not to get even or take our "bad day" out on THEM.

- We should lovingly teach that sin is first an offense against GOD. God HATES sin.
- Therefore, children must learn how to confess sins by name, ask forgiveness of God and the one offended, then ask God for help to repent.

17. Disciplining inconsistently. (Eccl. 8:11)

God says: **"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11).**

- a. When parents habitually overlook wrongdoing, it reinforces sinful habits in parents and children alike.
- b. We're also disciplining inconsistently if we deck a child for an offense one day and just let it go the next.
- c. A third area of inconsistent discipline is when a mother and father fail to agree on the standards. Perhaps one parent just talks — or YELLS — but the other one spansks.
  - To be fair, children should be trained to obey right away — not when they feel like it. (Delayed obedience is disobedience.)
  - When correction is administered speedily, they're more likely to "get the picture" that such behavior is definitely unprofitable.

18. Abusing them emotionally. (Eph. 4:31-32; Matt. 18:5-6)

- a. Emotional abuse is a serious matter. As a child might describe it, the abuser is "just plain mean." When one of Christ's precious lambs is treated like this, it GRIEVES the Holy Spirit.
  - How many of you still remember harsh or unkind words spoken to YOU?

- Just think of the lifelong memories children can have of daily doses of such meanness?

God commands that we FORSAKE "... all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, . . . [along] with all malice: . . ."

Such sin is to be REPLACED with being ". . . kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31-32).

19. Abusing them physically. (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7; Num. 22)

God says: "A bishop [or overseer, according to Strong's Concordance] must be blameless . . . no striker, . . . but patient, not a brawler" (1 Tim. 3:3).

- a. Angry out-of-control parents can do great physical (and emotional) harm to their children.
- b. Sometimes a child is disciplined severely simply because the PARENT is angry over something totally unrelated to that child's behavior.
  - Or, a parent is embarrassed in front of friends. When a child misbehaves in the presence of company, we ought to ask ourselves: "Am I angry about a sin against GOD — or shame before man?"
  - Another example is jumping to conclusions before getting to the heart of the matter.
- c. To avoid the possibility of physical harm, BEFORE disciplining, STOP and "cool off" by first praying for God's peace and discernment.
  - Send the child needing discipline to his room so that you aren't tempted to do something you'll both regret.
  - If need be, have your spouse take over.
  - The only proper place for application of the rod is the "seat of learning." Slapping, hitting with fists, kicking, beating

with an object, etc. is never acceptable.

NOTE: Beloved, if children are habitually in danger of being injured — or even their lives at stake — this normally necessitates getting outside help to resolve longstanding anger issues.

- d. In any discipline situation, we should first ask God to keep our anger in check; then help us to lovingly instill a hatred of sin, because God HATES it. (Of course, this means that WE should be modeling this spirit ourselves.)
- We should pray that God will enable the child to respond to discipline with an open heart.

20. Not admitting when wrong. (Matt. 5:23-26; Job 32:2; James 5:16; Prov. 16:18; James 4:6)

- a. Never admitting that we're wrong is one of the highest forms of pride — which is "Self" on the throne instead of God.

God says: **"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).**

Romans 12:3 tells us that we are: **". . . not to think of [ourselves] more highly than we ought to think; but to think soberly, . . ."** (Rom. 12:3).

- If we refuse to admit we're ever wrong, a communication barrier will be erected between us and others.
  - Our children will learn by example to never admit when THEY are wrong. This in turn will make fruitful discipline even more difficult.
  - This is such a serious matter to the Lord that He says He doesn't even WANT our offerings to Him until we've first been reconciled with our brother — which includes children as well. (Matt. 5:23-24)
- b. God's way is expressed in James 5:16:

He says: "**Confess your faults one to another . . . The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much**"

- Admitting a wrong by name, asking forgiveness of God and the one offended, is vital to healing broken fellowships.

**Transition:** Anger is a GOLIATH that every person must face and conquer. But, like David, we do not war without hope. When David faced HIS "Goliath," he knew the secret of victory. He trusted not in his own strength, but claimed in faith: ". . . the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give [Goliath] into our hands" (1 Samuel 17:47). For the next few moments, I want to read one family's testimony of their personal battle with the Goliath called ANGER — and how God has been delivering them.

## B. CONQUERING THE GOLIATH OF ANGER.

### The Husband and Father's Testimony:

**THE PROBLEM:** Growing up in a home wrecked by divorce within a year of my birth, I observed continual bitterness and resentment in my own mother toward others who crossed her. At 15 years of age, I went to live with my father. Although the environment was different, I observed explosive anger as my dad dealt with child discipline.

Experiencing injustices as a child, especially from older children picking on younger ones, I hated parenting styles lacking in discipline and soft on consequences for wrong behavior. So, I determined to not be wishy-washy with discipline; and I would not tolerate complaining or whining, bad attitudes, or unkind acts. Nevertheless, just as I learned behaviors and attitudes from my parents, so did my children learn behavior and attitudes from me, like a malignant cancer spreading.

I wanted my children to be obedient . . . But instead of leading my children to righteous behavior, I was prodding and pushing them, even belittling them at times. God was opening my eyes to see how I was trying to fulfill a legitimate goal using illegitimate means. "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

My ruling lust was for control; and when my standards weren't met, I sought to become like the Holy Spirit as I attempted to convict their spirits with my anger. Proverbs 30:33 says: ". . . so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife." I usurped the role of the Holy Spirit instead of allowing Him to control, direct, and lead my children to obedience. This actually hindered any progress of being changed into His image. "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).

As an angry father, I also would turn my anger toward any other family members who I perceived

to be meddling or interfering with my parenting — good or bad. Oddly, as others were hurt from my anger, I hurt myself also. For Proverbs 15:32 says: "He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: . . ." My mind had been on myself and my pleasures and the results were selfish motives in all areas of child training. I was causing strife, just as God warned in Proverbs 15:18: "A wrathful man stirreth up strife: . . ."

**THE REMEDY:** I wanted to speak words to help my family (Prov. 15:1-2, 4, 18), not harm them, but I needed help. I began meeting regularly with certain men that I trusted, and looked up to. My wife and I would meet with them together, and later I would meet with them alone. Each meeting, a report was given on how things were going and how our relationship was being affected. For God says: ". . . he that heareth reproof getteth understanding." At these times, Scriptures were given to me to memorize and meditate upon. I began praying specifically according to the verses given to me whereby God revealed deficiencies, such as rebellion, willfulness, laziness, and selfishness. (The list of deficiencies goes on, but for time's sake, I'll stop with these.)

Galatians 5:19-20 listed some obvious sins. Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, and witchcraft were listed alongside wrath or raging anger. Here I was convicted of my sin and the need of repentance. This is God's work and none of my own. Through prayer, God changed me from within.

**THE FRUIT:** As a result, my wife has been happier and feels more secure. My children are more responsive to her instructions and they are even greater blessings in the home. Proverbs 16:32 says: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

#### The Wife and Mother's Testimony:

TO MEN: Even though my husband came from a broken home, I saw wonderful qualities in him that I knew would make him a good daddy some day. So, I was quite unprepared for the pattern of anger that began to emerge after our first child was born. I wished often that my husband would have understood how his anger towards our children affected me. First, his harsh treatment of them made me feel unloved because of my deep need for him to be a good father. His habitual anger in dealing with our children, and the resulting feelings of not being loved, made it harder and harder for me to consistently emotionally respond to him the way he wanted me to. As a homeschooling mother, it felt as if I had three times the work than I normally would have trying to biblically counteract and retrain the pattern of selfishness and anger our kids had learned to emulate. It robbed our family of joy we *could* have had if a happy daddy walked through the door instead of an angry one each day, perpetuating the cycle. And, I had to constantly give my own anger toward my husband back to the Lord.

When we got married, he *also* had dreams of what family life would be like. However, his anger alienated us and ended up creating the opposite scenario. Because he is now repenting, though, and working on godly leadership, my emotional responsiveness to him — and the children's — is

becoming much closer to what he had originally dreamed of. A godly man is truly irresistible to his wife.

**TO WOMEN:** Ladies, if you have an angry husband, the greatest thing to learn is that you can trust God. Pray fervently for him and allow God to do the work in his life. Speak less, especially when you have an urge to share "insights." If you are speaking too loudly, he will never be able to hear the "still, small voice" of the Holy Spirit. It may seem that God doesn't care, and will never hold your husband accountable. But that's just one of Satan's lies. Allow God to minister to you through Scripture, and meditate on it as if your's and your entire family's very lives depended upon it. It has the power to transform you and make you grateful for the hardship that has drawn you closer into our Lord's fellowship.

At times, you may be tempted to run to friends or family for shelter and compassion. Yet a momentary lack of discretion could tarnish your husband's reputation, which can last long after God has brought victory in his life. More importantly, God *commands* it for He says: "Speak evil of no one" (Titus 3:2). God's desire is that we seek refuge in the shadow of His hand, as He states frequently in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Also, God can provide a Titus 2 woman who can minister biblical counsel and comfort during the toughest times. Learn, predominantly though, to pour your heart out to the Lord. Taking this step of faith opens up a floodgate of blessing in your life of not only an intimate relationship with our Lord but also a meek and quiet spirit, which is precious in God's sight.

I also want to add to remember to keep yourselves under authority (your husband and church elders). God's design is to direct you through them. Don't fight against circumstances in your life that are out of your control; but give yourself to God for however He wants to use you. And pray each day that you will be a faithful servant in whatever presents itself.

As for the children, teach them these same principles. Teach them in humility, asking forgiveness as often as you need to, that even though we as parents sin, they must still be taught obedience and loving responses. Our homes are a training ground for future service for Christ. Every child will in their lifetime face numerous injustices from many sources. Learning right responses which please God NOW can actually offer a unique opportunity to better prepare them to stand out as salt and light in this self-centered world.

#### The 8-Year-Old's Testimony:

**LIFE WITH DADDY THEN:** Sometimes Daddy would get in a fight with Mommy about my brother and me. And whenever I saw her cry, I always felt that it was MY fault — what I did. Sometimes I would cry too. I got mad because Daddy never listened to me. Being the oldest of 4 kids, I always knew what was going on in the family. I just felt like there was an empty place in my heart.

**LIFE WITH DADDY NOW:** When Daddy was out of work a long time, it made him mad. I

don't know why, it just did. But now that he is a painter, that's kind of loosened things up because every time he comes home, he is such a happy daddy. Only once can I remember him fighting with Mama. And I have never heard or seen him do it again. And that's what makes me happy.

Before, when my brother did something bad, Daddy would do it back to him for whatever he did. But now, I am happy because Daddy just forgives him. Now, Daddy is following the verse that says we should overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21).

#### The Maternal Grandmother's Testimony:

As a grandparent, watching a daughter and grandchildren hurting emotionally has been heartwrenching. It's been hard NOT taking up an offense on their behalf. But the only RIGHT choice has been lots of praying, comforting through the Word, plus exhorting to be responsible for their OWN attitudes. And, above all, to TRUST the Lord "no matter what." **I KNOW — because this precious family is my daughter's.**

**Transition:** So then, how DOES one learn to manage this Goliath called Anger? It's not possible to thoroughly analyze such a complex subject in our brief time together. For that reason, I'll only be sharing some basic scriptural guidelines. **I'll be moving quickly, but don't let that discourage you. You may have a free copy of the transcript through our web site.** And I pray that you'll take advantage of the "Recommended Reading List" by doing further study on your own.

### C. DEFUSING ANGER IN PARENTING.

#### A. Steps to Resolve Anger.

1. Recognize sinful anger for what it is: don't couch it in other words like "discouraged, frustrated, sad, worried, depressed, annoyed, or irritated."<sup>8</sup>
2. The very *first* step in defusing parental anger is to humble ourselves by confessing an angry spirit and asking the Holy Spirit for victory.

- The key to receiving God's blessings and strength is humility.

According to Andrew Murray, "**Humility, the place of entire dependence upon God, is . . . the first duty and the highest virtue of man. It is the root of every virtue. And so pride, or the loss of this humility, is the root of every sin and evil.**"<sup>9</sup>

- Murray made an insightful comment when he said: "**It is in our most unguarded moments that we really show and see what we**

are."<sup>10</sup>

- WHO is likely to see most of our unguarded moments? Our families. We therefore ought to conclude that offenses exist. Ask your spouse and children to identify anything that you need to make right with them.
  - Listen without getting defensive. (This isn't easy because PRIDE will fight you on it!) At an appropriate time, ask for forgiveness.
  - **Principle: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18).**
  - If forgiveness is not forthcoming immediately, be patient and loving. Give God time to work in their hearts — and yours.
  - These guidelines apply to others who have an offense as well.
3. Renew your mind and heart through meditation on Scriptures relating to anger. When tempted to anger, PRAY, then speak to yourself with: "It is written . . ."
  4. Be alert to anything that pushes your personal "hot button," such as frustrations over failing to get everything done, constant deadlines to meet, unfulfilled expectations, not getting your own way.
    - Give up personal rights and expectations and replace those with God's control. **"My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him" (Psa. 62:5).**
  5. Don't let momentary "flareups" of angry feelings take root.
    - a. The *feeling* of anger, that first flash of emotion, is not in itself sin. (Satan just loves to shoot such fiery darts at us!)
    - b. Entertaining such an emotion by allowing it to take root in our minds and hearts *is* sin.
    - c. In other words, Ephesians 4:26-27, could be reworded as follows:  
**"If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge. Don't let**

**the sun go down with you still angry — get over it quickly; for when you are angry, you give a mighty foothold to the devil" (TLB).**

6. You've probably heard this saying: "It's not what we EXPECT but what we INSPECT that gets results."
  - a. Based on that, ask a mature person in the Lord, one you trust, to hold you accountable.
  - b. Meet regularly to discuss how things have been going. Spend time in prayer together.
7. Whenever you "blow it," make things right with the offended person as quickly as possible. Strive to keep communication lines open.
  - a. Lovingly, and prayerfully, communicate how you feel so the one offended is more likely to be receptive. (Tone of voice is critical!)
    - God says: **"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness" (Prov. 15:1-2).**

**Example:** When one of our daughters was a teenager, my husband sternly scolded her for something. After he was through, she simply replied: "Thank you, Daddy! I *needed* that!" Ed said that her soft answer "took the wind out of his sails" fast!

**Transition:** Now, let's turn our attention to helping our children manage anger.

## **II. TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO MANAGE THEIR ANGER.**

- A. Common Manifestations of Anger in Children.
  1. In children, anger can lead to full-blown rebellion. In *The Heart of Anger*, Lou Priolo lists five steps to destruction:<sup>11</sup>
    - a. A wounded spirit — feeling "hurt."
    - b. Bitterness — mulling an offense over and over in the mind, refusing to overlook or forgive.

- c. Anger — the pervasive kind that is characteristic of a child's personality.
    - This type anger is what God warns dads against provoking (Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21).
  - d. Stubbornness — being "stiffnecked" at parental attempts to correct.
  - e. Rebellion — the final stage of being the kind of fool described in Proverbs.
2. During a child's formative years, up until age six or so, we shouldn't *expect* children to manage anger well.
- a. Young children usually vent their anger verbally or physically (or both).
    - Verbal expressions (e.g., yelling, calling people names, sticking a tongue out, claims of "I hate you!").
    - Physical expressions (e.g., throwing stuff, pinching, biting, hitting, kicking).
  - b. Verbal anger is often easier to deal with than physical.
  - c. Physical anger must never be tolerated.
    - If need be, help the child settle down by separating him from whatever, or whomever, has lit the anger fuse in him.
    - When he's calmed down, biblically resolve the problem together.
    - By the way, a toddler who throws temper tantrums needs to be taught self-control early in life — how to give up his "own way" to follow God's way.

## B. Steps to Help Defuse a Child's Anger.

- 1. The best way to defuse a child's anger is to prevent it from building in the first place.

- a. Keep your child's "love tank" full. According to Chapman and Campbell, an empty "love tank" is one of the main causes for anger and behavioral problems.
- b. Screen your children's friends. Discourage associating with friends having anger problems.

God says: **"Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul" (Prov. 22:24-25).**

- c. Teach children to walk by God's law of love by treating others the way they want to be treated. (Matt. 7:12)
  - Help them learn to be a good *listener*, for God says: **". . . let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: . . ." (James 1:19).**
  - Every child needs to learn to control his tongue because: . . . **the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (Prov. 29:11).**

2. When your child becomes angry because of an offense against *him*, show how to apply the "brother offended" principle before coming to you. (Matt. 18:15)

- a. Teach to respectfully discuss an anger problem with the offending person. (This should include talking to us if *we're* the offenders.)
- b. If the offender refuses to listen, the next biblical step is to take 2 or 3 witnesses to resolve the problem. (The younger the child, the more difficult this can be.)
- c. If unable to resolve the problem peacefully, then the child should bring it to a parent's attention.

d. Teach this principle:

**". . . avenge not yourselves but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).**

- In other words, children need to learn: "**Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good**" (Rom. 12:21).

NOTE: Doorposts has a great "Brother Offended" chart to help train children in this procedure. Their book, *For Instruction in Righteousness*, provides lengthy lists of verses appropriate for use with various misbehaviors. Available at the Doorposts booth or Christ Centered Publications.

3. When your child displays anger towards *you or someone else*, rather than respond in like kind, or berate the child for it, help him *respectfully* verbalize *why* he or she is so angry. (If need be, give him an example of actual words he might use.)

**Three-Year-Old Example:** The other day, my 3-year-old grandson was playing in my office. All of a sudden he started yelling at the jeep he was trying to push: "Dumb JEEP! Dumb JEEP!" Taking a moment to discern the problem, I said: "Thomas, is that plastic jeep giving you trouble?" He replied, "Grammy, it's TOO soft. I can't PUSH it!" I then replied, "Well, why don't we go get one that ISN'T so soft?" With a big sigh of relief, he came over and gave me a big hug. Then he played contentedly with a metal truck.

- Focus on the *problem* rather than the *person*.
- Help him identify his responsibility by leading him to confess his sin and ask forgiveness.

Example: "I'm sorry for getting angry, Mommy. I was wrong. Will you forgive me?"

- Pray together, seeking God's help to control anger in the future.

## C. SUMMARY.

1. In summary, remind yourself to **expect** children to act like children.
  - a. Foolishness is bound up in the hearts of children so don't be surprised when it rears its ugly head. Simply deal with it biblically.
  - b. View each counseling situation as an opportunity to train for Christ.

2. God can take even struggles/offenses like these and work them for good in the lives of all those affected by it. The principle is found in Romans 8:28: **"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."**
  
3. Through faith, we can therefore trust God to restore what the "anger locusts" have destroyed. This principle is found in Joel 2:25-26:  
  
**"And I will restore to you the years that the [anger] locust hath eaten . . . And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall not be ashamed."**

**OVERHEAD:** A transcript of this message is available free of charge at our web site: [www.christcentercurriculum.com](http://www.christcentercurriculum.com).

Also, for you dads who would like more help on BEING a father, I highly recommend Dr. John Barnett's GROWING DADS GOD'S WAY series of six tapes plus transcripts. You can get information on this at our web site.

PRAYER...

## Recommended Reading:

- *Self-Confrontation: A MANUAL FOR IN-DEPTH DISCIPLESHIP* teaches how to examine ourselves biblically so we can live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. It includes extensive scriptural references for personal growth, interpersonal relationships, marriage, parenting, plus dealing with anger and bitterness, depression, fear and worry, and life-dominating sins. To order this great book, call the Biblical Counseling Foundation at 760-773-2667.
- Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger* (Calvary Press), is excellent because it is so highly scriptural.
- Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* covers parenting, with an emphasis on the heart of your child.
- Chapman and Campbell, in the *five Love Languages of Children*, offer practical tips on how to fill your children's "love baskets" as well as help them manage anger.

END NOTES ...

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CHECK OUR WEB SITE AT:**

**[www.christcentercurriculum.com](http://www.christcentercurriculum.com)**

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1. Institute in Basic Life Principles, "Effective Counseling Course, Part Eight," p. 2.
2. Chapman and Campbell, *five Love Languages of Children*, p. 146.
3. Reinecker, p. 540, as cited in *GROWING DADS GOD'S WAY*, Dr. John Barnett, p. 54.
4. NTC, Ephesians, p. 62, as cited in *GROWING DADS GOD'S WAY*, Dr. John Barnett, p. 54.
5. Ibid.
6. H. Norman Wright, *Winning Over Your Emotions* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR), 1998, p. 49.
7. Ibid., p. 68.
8. Ibid., p. 59.
9. Andrew Murray, *Humility* (Whitaker House: New Kinsington, PA), 1982, p. 10.
10. Ibid., p. 44.
11. Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger* (Calvary Press: Amityville, NY), 1997, pp. 21-22.