

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My teenager is argumentative and angry. He goes through periods of not speaking to my wife and me. He is not blatantly disrespectful, but is very close to it. He knows the right buttons to push. I am furious with him! What's the best way to handle him?

ANSWER: It is good that you recognize your anger. James 1:20 tells us: "The anger of man does not work the righteousness of God." Few of us parents do godly anger well. Usually, our anger emerges as a secondary emotion after we are hurt, frustrated, or scared. **Often in men, anger flares as a result of feeling unable and incapable of dealing with a situation successfully.**

When dealing with your son, **your mood and motive are everything.** You must control your anger, or it will give your son both the power and the justification to continue in his present behavior. Your anger will be perceived as a vengeful attack and an indication of weakness.

Your job as a godly father is to **surprise** him with the strength of your love. You must react in ways that are not expected. When Jesus talked about "turning the other cheek", he was not advocating being a doormat. He was presenting one way (There are zillions!) to "overcome evil with good", to do the unexpected, and to stop evil in its tracks for the opportunity of transformation and reconciliation.

When evil lashes out, it expects the recipient (1) to flee, or (2) to strike back, or (3) to hide behind a wall of emotional numbness. Evil does not expect the recipient to look it in the eye and offer good, or stay deeply involved, or be sorrowful. **It is in the surprise of good (Grace), it is in "turning the other cheek"; that evil is caught, exposed and immobilized; and there is a chance for transformation.** It is in the strength, not the softness of love, that evil is overcome; fathers are equipped by God to demonstrate the strength of love. Evil will devour love that is weak. Weak love reacts to evil by one of the three responses listed above. Weak love flees. Weak love strikes back in anger. Weak love hides. Weak love is a doormat.

Your job as a godly father is to pray for and work for the transformation of your son by surprising him with the strength of love—a love that risks the breaking of your own heart for the sake of relationship. That is your motive. Your mood must be one of godly sorrow for a son following the way of a fool. Your son must see the sadness in your eyes and hear the sorrow in your voice as you speak to him. You must meet his anger and defiance with the strength of an open heart. You must be firm, but not vengeful or angry. You must never withdraw your love or involvement, for that is precisely what your son expects.

Although each circumstance will be a little different, and each teenager unique, your mood of godly sorrow and your motive of loving him in strength will not change. You must be creative and consistent, with an air of "mystery." Your son should never be able to predict exactly just what you will do; he should never be able to manipulate you into anger or resignation. You must always be a step ahead of him. (If you are not like this, you will have to prove through time and

consistency that you will handle him in this new way.) To be this kind of godly father will require planning and prayer. There is no “list” for how to proceed in every circumstance, just the parameters of mood and motive framed by the strength of godly love.

In a confrontation, such love *might* show itself like this:

Son: “You’re mean! You never let me do anything! I never want to talk to you again!”

Father: “Son, I know you meant to hurt me by your words. (pause) You have. But, you must know that your anger and disrespect will not push me aside. My love for you is forever.” (in a mood of sorrow, calmness and sincerity)

Throughout the following hours and days, your son must experience you as moving toward him (the surprise of Grace). **Your love must outlast him.** Through your words, touch and actions, his anger, revenge and disobedience must be absorbed by the strength of your love. You are not a doormat; you are an expert swordsman who parries every thrust of evil with the blade of deep loving involvement. A master swordsman who eventually moves so close to his son that the boy can no longer swing his blade...because his arms have been wrapped in an embrace of love.

God wants to do far more than just transform your son; he wants to transform you. What an adventure awaits!

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