

## **(PG) Parental Guidance Needed**

**Title: Part 4 – “Helping Kids Express Anger Appropriately”**

**Date: May 18, 2025**

While everyone here in the house is saying “Hi” to each other I want to say “Hi” if you are joining us online or on our app, thank you for spending some time with us! We consider you a part of our church family so let us know how we can pray for you or serve you, and as always, if this message blesses you then consider sharing it with a friend or family member.

If you have not been with us for the past few weeks, we are in a collection of messages called “(PG) Parental Guidance Needed.” If you missed the first 3 messages I highly recommend going back and watching them from our app. Whether you are a parent or not, has this been helpful for anyone in the house?

TODAY is actually the final installment, and I am bummed because I have worn this same black shirt for 4 weeks now to be all matchy-matchy with the graphics and now I have to figure out what to wear next Sunday.

Parenting is a lot like that though. You find something that works for you and roll with it for a while but then as your kids grow and change you realize you gotta find something else now! That’s what I want to talk about today, BUT FIRST let’s read our theme text for the final time from Psalm 78. Let’s all read this out loud together:

**<sup>5</sup> He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which He commanded our ancestors to teach their children, <sup>6</sup> so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. <sup>7</sup> Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands.**

According to these verses, our goal as parents is to raise:

- Children who "set their hope in God."
- Children who "do not forget the works of God."
- Children who "keep His commandments."

Whether our kids or young or old the job of a parent is never finished. SO, as we wrap this up for now, I want to preach a message I am calling:

**Helping Kids Express Anger Appropriately**

This should be fun, right? If you are ready for this say, "Let's go!"

Anger is a universal emotion—a natural fight response when we feel threatened. However, our instincts, distorted by sin, often trigger this protective mechanism against non-threatening situations. This is why you blow up when your kid does something like spill their milk or they break a lamp horsing around. Not that anyone today has ever done that.

For children, anger presents unique challenges. Without life context, small disappointments can feel catastrophic. You ever have a kid lose their minds over a lost or broken toy? That's because their underdeveloped frontal cortex—which doesn't fully form until around age 12—makes self-regulation difficult, leaving them prone to lashing out when upset. A child genuinely doesn't understand what's happening internally and lacks the maturity to dial back their emotions.

Ironically though, we expect our children to handle anger constructively when we as adults often struggle with the same challenge! SO, today's message addresses both—helping children AND adults better manage anger. Because learning to manage this powerful emotion is one of the most crucial skills we can teach our children.

And hear me, I know some of you as parents are currently battling this issue in real time. Your child's fuse seems to get shorter and shorter as their outbursts intensify. Despite trying various approaches, nothing seems effective. Today, I want you to know you are not alone!

The key to helping an angry child is guiding them to trace their feelings back to the source. By identifying the root cause—whether hurt, fear, or frustration—they can address the actual problem rather than just the symptomatic anger. This process helps them develop emotional intelligence that will serve them throughout life.

As well-known pastor and theologian, Tim Keller once said:

**"Anger itself isn't sin—it's what we do with it that matters."**

And that's what we will explore today. How to transform this challenging emotion into an opportunity for growth. BUT before we talk about the essentials in helping kids deal with anger. I think we first need to acknowledge a unique time in childhood that is known for lots of tension and anger and that is this:

**The teenage years are a time of constant change.**

Can I get an "Amen" from anyone who's survived raising a teenager?

Adolescents experience more physical changes during these five years than any other time in their lives. And parents? I've heard it said that between the ages of 13 and 18, a parent can age as much as 20 years! Anyone feeling that right now?

Think about it—a teen's brain transforms to think abstractly. Their bodies produce more oil, causing breakouts that send them into emotional tailspins. And yes—they become fertile! All these changes create deep insecurity. They misinterpret everything and constantly question if what they're feeling is normal.

And while every stage of life has challenges that must be mastered to grow, some of the biggest facing your teenager and mine are these two, the big "I's". The first is:

## **Independence.**

This is why responsibility training is crucial! We talked about that in part 2. When children learn early that good choices bring good consequences and bad choices bring bad ones, they can handle greater freedom as they mature. They crave independence, but the truth is, they actually need it!

Dr. Eric Erickson, the renowned child development expert, found that adolescents must develop an identity separate from their family. Anger often accompanies this process. Why though? Because anger surfaces when a child feels powerless. That's why your teenager snaps when you ask them to pick up their shoes or melts down when you interrupt their video game—you're "invading" their world.

When teens feel they lack control, they'll do anything to regain it—slamming doors, breaking things, even hitting siblings. While these behaviors are unacceptable, we need to acknowledge their anger while setting clear limits.

The second challenge teens face is:

## **Identity.**

The central question during these years is "Who am I?" And typically, their first answer is "I'm NOT you!" SO, they try on different values, beliefs, clothes, and hairstyles to discover themselves.

One way they assert individuality is through the "you-can't-make-me-hold-your-values" game. Your teen comes home saying something outrageous like, "I think anybody should

be able to have sex with anybody else—it's nobody's business, especially parents." Then they watch for your explosion! Right? AND when you do react, inadvertently you force them into the position of defending a value that they don't actually hold. Does that make sense? But suppose you responded in a different way.

Instead of reacting with "Are you crazy? Do you know how many diseases you could get? Do you want to get pregnant at 16?" Instead—easier said than done—try this, "Interesting. That wouldn't work for me—I'd rather not live with a gross STD and have to put college on hold because I had a baby to care for. But I see how a teenager might think that way." Responding this way, you've stated your belief without creating a battle. Right?

By the way, let me offer a little guilt relief to parents with angry teenagers. Ross Campbell, a noted authority on children says this:

“Often a child will express more anger at one parent than the other, and the mother is usually the target. I have talked with many wonderful mothers who interpret this as negative and consider themselves bad mothers. This can result in guilt and depression, and yet in most homes, the child's behavior is not only normal, but indicates that the mother is doing her job beautifully.”

Moms, get this—your child feels so loved and secure with you that they feel safe expressing negative feelings! They know that no matter what they say, you'll never reject them. That doesn't mean permitting inappropriate anger, but when they bring it to you verbally, you're in a position to help them navigate it.

See a child's anger must come out somewhere. When it happens with mom, it doesn't mean you're doing something wrong—it means they trust your relationship to handle it. Don't feel guilty, be grateful they perceive your bond as strong enough for complete honesty.

I know there is a lot more we could say here, and maybe when both my girls have gone through the teen years and have kids of their own I'll be able to speak more into this, but I think we acknowledge this special and unique time if we are going to talk about helping our kids deal with anger.

SO, let's zoom out now and spend a few minutes talking about this, the:

**Essentials in helping kids deal with anger.**

And the first essential is simply this:

## **1. Never expect a child to handle anger any better than you do.**

There's a writer for Reader's Digest who studied the Amish community for an article and noticed something remarkable—their children never screamed at each other in the schoolyard. Amazed, he mentioned this to the principal, who simply asked, "Have you ever heard an Amish adult yell at another adult?" Ouch, right?

The truth is children and adults don't express anger all that differently. Yes, adults have larger vocabularies and more resources, including physical strength, but watch an angry adult—it's usually not far from an eight-year-old's behavior. Just check TikTok if you don't believe me!

The Bible addresses this directly in Romans 2:21, the Apostle Paul writes:

**<sup>21</sup> But how can you teach others when you refuse to learn?**

When we respond to our older child yelling at our younger child by yelling ourselves, aren't we just reinforcing the very behavior we want to eliminate? Anyone else guilty besides me?

Dr. Peter Stavinoha, a neuropsychologist at Children's Medical Center in Dallas, says:

**“Kids learn how to deal with anger and disappointment by watching those around them, and parents are first-in-line role models, whether or not they realize their kids are paying attention to their behaviors.”**

There comes a point for every parent when we are tempted to raise the volume and escalate the conflict because we are bigger, stronger and louder. This is exactly when we need to say, "This is getting tense—we need a break." We must be self-aware enough as parents to know how to both start AND STOP conversations, because most kids respond to harshness with even more intensity.

SO, if you are like me and find yourself flaring up when your child does, ask yourself: Do I want my kids focused on my emotion, or their behavior? Right? We're trying to teach self-control, so the ship is already sunk if we're not in control ourselves.

Foster Klein and Jim Fay of the Love and Logic Institute warn that when parents display similar emotional fireworks as their kids:

**“[They are] rewarding our children for sassing us, we are giving them emotion, and they thrive on parental emotion.”**

But you know, this principle also works in reverse. What I'm saying is you can use this approach to keep another person from becoming angry. You can control the other person's tone of voice by your own voice. Psychology has proven that if you keep your voice soft, you won't become angry. AND the Bible has said the same thing for thousands of years. Listen to this: (Proverbs 15:1)

**A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**

This wisdom of Scripture is when you model control, you teach your children how to control themselves, which means before we can help our kids deal with anger, we have to learn to deal with our own anger.

Here's something else essential in helping our kids:

## **2. Never tell someone to do something you can't make them do.**

Here is what I mean. You shouldn't tell your kids stop crying or stop being angry. You know why? Because it doesn't work for one thing! But also, you can't command a feeling, and if you try to then BOTH of you are just going to end up upset. Amen?

Instead, direct them to where they can express those emotions. Namely, away from you! You can absolutely say, "I really don't need this right now. If you want to continue to act like this you can go to your room, look in the mirror and find an appreciative audience." That then is teaching them that they are within their rights to feel this way, but on the same hand, no one wants to be around an angry, out of control person!

Children often persist because they want to ensure you understand they're upset. SO, try saying, "I know you're mad, and I appreciate you letting me know. But now that you know that I know how you feel, I don't need to know anymore. If you need to process this further, go to your room until your voice is as calm as mine."

Also remember the difference between assertive anger (which we encourage) and disrespect (which we discourage). Assertive anger says, "I feel strongly about this" while maintaining dignity for both parties. Disrespect says, "You don't matter" or "My feelings trump everything." When your child expresses anger by saying, "I'm really upset we can't

go to the park today," that's healthy. When they shout, "You're the worst parent ever!" that's disrespect.

Bottom line, anyone can power up and frighten a child into compliance through intimidation or threats. You might win the battle in the moment, but what's really happening? Your child isn't learning emotional regulation—they're learning fear. As James 1:20 reminds us:

**<sup>20</sup> Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.**

As theologian Frederick Buechner once said, "Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun." BUT when we model angry control, all we're teaching our children is that volume and power are how you really get your way.

Another thing we need to do is:

### **3. Always think about the message behind the message.**

Ever notice how the strongest messages aren't what we say, but what we imply? These "covert messages" shape how our kids see themselves and their abilities more than we understand.

Consider two approaches to the same homework situation:

- Message A – "Finish your homework now or I'm taking your phone!" (OR)
- Message B – "I'm wondering if graduating high school is even important to you?"

The first says, "What am I going to do about YOUR problem?" The second keeps ownership where it belongs—with your child. Are you with me? It's the message behind the message.

When we threaten, "Do it or I'll get mad," we're teaching them to make decisions based on OUR emotions rather than THEIR reasoning. AND is that really what we want when they face peer pressure? No way, right?

Imagine your child is offered drugs at a friend's house. Do you want them thinking, "My parents would be furious if they found out?" OR should they be thinking, "I don't know what's in that stuff. It could be toxic, addictive, or deadly. That's just stupid—I'm not doing it."

When children avoid poor choices solely because "Mom and Dad would be mad," we've failed twice. First, we've trained them to make decisions based on external voices—perfect preparation for giving in to peer pressure. And second, we might actually encourage rebellion in kids determined to provoke us!

Instead, let's guide them to own their problems and think through consequences themselves.

Dr. Kevin Leman, a well-known Christian psychologist and author of numerous parenting books says:

"When you do for your children what they can do for themselves, you create children who are dependent and irresponsible. When you require your children to do what they are capable of doing—and even a little bit more—you create children who are independent and responsible."

So good, right?

SO, let's say you've kept all these essentials in mind. You never expect a child to handle anger any better than you do. You never tell a child to do something you can't make them do. AND you are thinking about the message behind the message. BUT what if your kid is in the middle of a meltdown? How do you deescalate angry situations? A few thoughts on what I am trying to get better at with you guys, first:

### **Deescalating angry situations:**

#### **Hesitate.**

Everyone say "hesitate." Here is what I mean, Ecclesiastes 7 says:

<sup>9</sup> Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

Anger makes our mouths work faster than our minds, amen? As parents, we need to pump the brakes and remember a few truths about our kids.

First, kids will act like kids! Don't expect them to handle emotions perfectly when they're still learning. How can they use tools we haven't given them?



Second, childish behavior is often just unpleasant. My daughters individually are delights, but together? Sometimes they act like they've been raised by wolves, deliberately provoking each other until one or both lash out! But that's part of growing up. Childish behavior is just going to be annoying.

Third, if we only show love when they please us, that's conditional love—leaving them forever insecure. Even in their unacceptable behaviors, children are asking, "Do you love me enough not to give up on me?"

Fourth, loving only when they meet expectations teaches them they're incompetent. Some of the best times to demonstrate love come after they've messed up. That's when we need to say, "I love you, and nothing will change that, but let's talk about this behavior."

As Gary Chapman once said, "Children need love most when they deserve it least."

SO, before you get angry too, accept their immature expressions of anger as normal, then guide them toward constructive ways to express hurts, fears, and frustrations.

A second step we need to deescalate angry kids is to:

## **Evaluate.**

The Bible says in Proverbs 15:28:

<sup>28</sup> The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking; the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words.

SO, when your child is angry, ask yourself three essential questions to help them navigate those big emotions. The first is:

## **What's Really Going On?**

Anger is never the first emotion we feel—it's always secondary. The primary feelings are hurt, fear, or frustration. Anger just follows on their heels.

Our job as parents is to help children trace their anger back to its source. Because most of us jump to anger so quickly that we don't recognize what's underneath. But anger conceals more than it reveals. Scripture shows us this pattern in Joseph's story: (Genesis 37:3-4)

<sup>3</sup> Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate[a] robe for him. <sup>4</sup> When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph's brothers felt unloved and unvalued compared to their brother—a gut-wrenching pain for any child. Rather than sit with those vulnerable feelings, they shifted to anger and hatred—outward-focused emotions that made them feel powerful instead of wounded.

All children need affirmation, approval, affection, and acceptance. When these needs aren't met, kids bolt toward anger because it hurts less than feeling unloved. Anger lets them redirect painful emotions outward rather than feeling them inward.

SO, as parents, we must become emotional detectives. What triggered the anger? What's the hurt, fear, or frustration underneath? As long as you focus only on the anger itself, you'll move further from a solution.

Now ask this, **what do I really want from this encounter?**

Do you want mere compliance or true responsibility? Asking this question helps eliminate responses that take you further from your desired outcome. Finally ask:

**What's the best way to get it?**

Sometimes the direct approach isn't best. I heard a story one time about an elderly man who moved to a quiet town to retire only to be disturbed by teenagers banging trash cans up and down the alley each day. BUT instead of yelling, he offered to pay them \$2 each to make noise. After two weeks, he reduced it to \$1, then finally to 25¢. The teens finally quit, saying, "We're not doing all that for just a quarter!" And from then on it was peace and quiet.

The point being, sometimes the creative approach solves the problem without creating more conflict!

When we look beneath the anger, understand our true goals, and approach the situation with wisdom rather than reaction, we help our children develop healthy emotional awareness and that leads us to this:

**Eliminate.**

And by eliminate I mean to eliminate anger on your part and let the consequence be the teacher.

In week two we talked about the law of sowing and reaping, the law of consequence. Listen to this from Galatians 6:7, the Apostle Paul writes:

**7 Do not deceive yourselves; no one makes a fool of God. You will reap exactly what you plant.**

Many of us grew up with parents who used anger, threats, lectures, intimidation, or physical punishment. But for children to truly learn, they must experience the consequences of their own choices.

Another example from the Love & Logic Institute people: Phil's 17-year-old daughter Tiffany came home with alcohol on her breath. Instead of confronting her immediately with anger, Phil waited until morning and approached her with sadness.

"I felt sorry for you last night," he said. "I smelled alcohol on your breath, and I started to worry about you. What would you guess about using the family car right now?" Tiffany replied, "I guess I might not be able to use it." "Good thinking," Dad responded. Phil set a clear limit, but when Tiffany tried to manipulate him, his response remained consistent:

**"Probably so."**

- "But I won't do it again." — "Probably so."
- "All the other kids get to do it!" — "Probably so."
- "You have a problem with alcohol! This is about you!" — "Probably so."
- "How am I supposed to get to the mall for work?" — "I don't know. I was wondering the same thing myself."
- "But I'll get fired!" — "Probably so."

Phil understood that for Tiffany to truly learn, she needed to learn from the inside out. She couldn't do this while blaming her father or deflecting responsibility because of his anger. True growth happens when parents step aside and allow children to face the natural consequences of their choices.

AND I know I make this sound so easy. Please know that is not the point and not my heart. I am struggling to get all this right with all of you. My kids have reminded me of this for four weeks now. BUT here is what I take hope in.

Throughout this collection of messages, I've been emphasizing this crucial truth: God is the archetype—the original pattern, the flawless design—the One in whose image we're made. An archetype is **"the original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies."** So, if we want to learn how to parent well, especially when it comes to handling anger, we need to look at how God parents us.

What strikes me about God's anger is that it's always just because it's always based on a thorough knowledge of every situation. That's so unlike us, isn't it? We rarely know the whole truth about any situation, but that doesn't stop us from getting angry, does it?

I call this "the great lie that accompanies anger"—the lie that we know the whole story. This lie makes us feel justified in hanging onto our anger because we tell ourselves, "I know what's really going on." BUT only God truly knows the whole truth. We can't even see how our own emotional baggage colors our perception!

Listen to this beautiful description of God though from Exodus 34:6:

**<sup>6</sup> "I, the Lord, am a God who is full of compassion and pity, who is not easily angered and who shows great love and faithfulness."**

This is a description repeated many times in Scripture about God, he's slow to anger. BUT you can't talk about anger without talking about patience, because that's what patience is—being slow to anger.

The Greek word for patience is *macrothumos*. Macro means "long" or "slow," and *thumos* means "heat." In other words, you're slow to heat up. You have a long fuse. You don't boil over quickly. That's our God!

AND here's what's amazing—God doesn't try to be patient. He just is. He doesn't have to bite His tongue or restrain His emotions. He simply bears with His children through thick and thin.

Now, I'm not saying God never gets angry—He certainly does. But His anger never involves misinterpreting a situation. He never feels threatened. He never loses control. When God gets angry, it's based on an accurate appraisal, and He never gets angry quickly.

We on the other hand tend to act out in anger, then stew on it. We ruminate and refuse to let it go. But God is the exact opposite. It takes Him forever to get angry, and once He does, He gets over it quickly and moves on. It never lingers. He doesn't hold grudges.

That's because anger was designed by God to have a short shelf life. The longer you hang onto it, the more it spoils, the more toxic it becomes in your spirit. Proverbs 14:29 says:

**29 Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.**

The key to patience is understanding. The more you understand your kids—where they are developmentally, why they struggle with anger, why they can't see the big picture—the more patient you'll be with them.

One powerful way to deal with our own anger AND to gain new understanding is through the practice of fasting. We studied this at Practicing the Way in February. We don't fast to lose weight or prove we can go without food. We fast because it reveals what controls us. How often do we cover up what's going on inside with food or other comforts? Richard Foster writes in "Spirit of the Disciplines":

**"Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear—if they're within us, they will surface during fasting."**

It's no accident that anger is first on Foster's list. When we fast, we get grumpy and short-tempered. Amen? We tell ourselves it's just because we're hungry, but could it be that we've been carrying an undercurrent of anger and covering it up?

Could our anger be the cap holding back our real hurts, fears, and frustrations? The spiritual purpose of fasting is that God can bring this unresolved stuff into the open. When things remain hidden, that's where they fester and gain power. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said:

**"Nothing hides us from each other as much as does our own anger."**

Once in the open, we can release it, and God can heal it. He can forgive it. AND we can be free!

See, sometimes the reason we struggle with our kids' anger is because we have unresolved anger ourselves—hurts that remain unhealed. When our kids act up, they get a dose of our unresolved issues. They become convenient targets for anger that's really about something else entirely.

Fasting is like house cleaning for the soul. It helps you get in touch with all the things you've been medicating or distracting yourself from. Once they surface, they can be faced and healed.

In other words, your irritability isn't from going without your favorite things—it's that now you're not covering it up or medicating with food or other distractions. Now that you're aware of it, your task is to yield it to God, to trace it back to its source, to ask what fear or frustration is driving this anger.

For your kids, you need the patience that comes from understanding. Know that they don't have what they need to regulate anger. They'll often be in touch with their anger but not the hurt, fear, or frustration driving it. BUT by God's grace as the parent who's worked through this yourself, you can help better equip them.

Most of all, I thank God for His patience with me. I can't imagine what an endless source of frustration I must be to Him sometimes, but He doesn't see me that way, does He? Why? Because He truly sees me! He gets me! He understands my weakness and immaturity!

AND He doesn't wait until I get it right to love me! He loves me in my weakness, in my failure, in my sin!

That's why I'm so confident in my standing with Him, why I can parent confidently—He's proven He truly loves me unconditionally.

May we learn to parent our children the way God parents us—with understanding, patience, and a love that isn't dependent on performance. Let me pray for us.