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THE PURPOSE OF ANGER

STEP 1: Learn to identify what is behind the expression of anger, and make that a primary focus.

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.” These are the opening words of Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*. Certainly Mr. Dickens did not intend to apply them to the life of teenagers and preteens. His focus was quite separate. Hardly any parent, however, would refute these words as an apt description of life in a home with maturing youths.

As children begin to take on the looks and thoughts of adults-in-waiting, they can be a delight, given their ability to relate with a keener mind and increased wit and higher reasoning. Parents can actually enjoy a young person’s enhanced abilities to contribute to the overall good of the household more fully than in previous years. It can be a blessing that the child has greater capacity for maintaining responsibilities and communicating with deeper awareness. The youth’s increased desire for independence, when channeled appropriately, is the beginning of interactions with parents that are less authoritarian and more typical of the mutual respect that exists in a healthy adult relationship.

That same desire for independence, however, can be the impetus for great friction in the home. In most parent-teen relationships, a built-in

friction exists because young people's overconfidence in themselves invariably clashes with their parents' desire for caution. Eager to spread their wings for flight, our youths may deem the wisdom of their elders unnecessary, only to discover that the elders are none too eager to be so summarily dismissed. The net result is ongoing conflict played out in the form of arguing, bargaining, and manipulation. The emotion beneath this conflict is anger.

Do you have a well-conceived plan for handling that anger? Do you know how to respond wisely when your young refute you? Have you taken the time to discern your own reasons for feeling angry? Do you recognize how patterns of control, insecurity, or fear can sabotage the emotional well-being of the home?

As you take the time to pore over the information in the pages to follow, you will be challenged to understand the anger that is sure to exist between yourself and the youths in your home. We are writing with the belief that the best way to teach your youngsters to handle anger appropriately is first to be aware of your own use of anger. Only as you understand your own emotional responses and how best to proceed with them can you guide your young in their emotions.

Most Christians are familiar with the traits listed in Galatians 5:22–23 as the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These certainly represent the qualities most desired by the majority of parents as they address conflict with their young. How often, though, do these traits go flying out the window as sons and daughters act defiantly or disobediently? Anger has a way of running roughshod over parents' best-laid plans; before they know what hit them it takes priority over the fruit of the Spirit, and the home atmosphere is ruined.

Our goal, as we work with parents, is to help them understand the nature of anger and learn how to tame it so anger allows them to teach their young the ways of God. If anger remains a constant in parent-and-child interaction, the young person's emotional and spiritual development is hindered greatly. On the other hand, if anger is managed in a balanced manner, the groundwork is laid for deeper teaching about the paths of the righteous.

Let's begin with a fundamental realization. Some parents will say, "I don't feel angry very often, but I do have regular experiences with frustration and irritability." In saying this, they show a misunderstanding of anger. Implied in such a comment is the notion that anger is displayed only through loud, raucous behavior such as shouting or slamming doors. If you do not engage in such behavior, so the reasoning goes, you are not experiencing anger.

Indeed, anger is often accompanied by noisy and forceful communication, but it is not that narrow in scope. Frustration *is* anger. Irritability is anger. Likewise, anger is in play when you feel impatient, when you cling to critical thoughts, when you are annoyed, and when you punish through withdrawal. Anger is a broad emotion; it can be experienced whether you are loud or silent.

No doubt, you have heard that you should never discipline your children in anger. This represents a noble thought, but it does not run parallel with reality. Being a parent, you *are* going to have many moments of agitation, disgust, or annoyance. In other words, you will feel angry toward your children just as they will feel angry toward you. Not only are these reactions not strange, but they commonly become the motivation that spurs you to address problems. Rather than trying to have (or pretending you have) no feelings of anger, it is best to admit its presence so you can then make informed decisions about the wisest way to proceed.

Ephesians 6:4 instructs fathers not to provoke their children to wrath. This is not meant to be a biblical injunction against having anger in the home, but to handle anger-producing conflicts in a manner that is healing rather than harmful. Instead of determining never to have anger, it is more realistic to first learn to identify the many ways in which anger can be expressed, for the purpose of then choosing to address the anger in the most constructive way. Trying to be anger-free as a parent is not a realistic goal. Trying to recognize the reasons for the anger so as to be most effective in family communication *is* a realistic goal.

Ephesians 4:26 tells us to "be angry, and yet do not sin," meaning that it can be normal to have angry emotions. Just a few verses prior to that, in Ephesians 4:15, we find the phrase "speaking the truth in love," which implies that directness and confrontation can still be managed within a

respectful framework. Whenever anger exists in your home (which it inevitably does), you have the option to manage it cleanly or to handle it in a less-than-constructive way. Our goal is to teach clean uses of anger that diminish the probability of ongoing dispute.

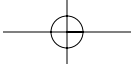
An Illustration

Rita spoke with Dr. Carter about her struggles with her two sons, Ryan and Ashton. They were twelve and fifteen, respectively. “Those boys are the two most competitive people on the planet,” she explained. “Their communication with each other is an ongoing battle for an edge over the other. Naturally, since Ashton is older he usually has the upper hand in their arguments, but Ryan is pretty feisty, and he thinks he can out-wit his brother on just about anything.”

Their family life had many of the same tensions as any other. The boys argued over which television shows they wanted to watch. Among the four family members there was one computer, and of course the boys would argue about who was spending more time using it. Sometimes the computer was needed for homework assignments, other times it was desired for pleasure. Arguments that began over a minor subject, perhaps using the computer, would often gain an irrational momentum and turn into a nasty fight that included shouting and insulting words, and worse. Ryan and Ashton frequently appealed to their mother to pronounce judgment upon the other’s lack of fair play.

For her part, Rita would try to play referee as calmly as possible, but on days when the bickering seemed both absurd and endless, she could explode. “What is it about you two that makes you feel you can spend your entire day arguing?” Her voice would be tense and condescending. Of course, such questions only fanned the flames, and never did she find good results by shouting and accusing. Nonetheless, friction and open conflict regularly visited their home as the same old broken patterns of communication were employed.

How about you? In what circumstances do you find yourself getting pulled in by your kids’ behavior? (For instance, “My son will tell me ex-



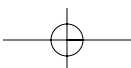
actly what he knows I want to hear, and then he'll do whatever he wants to do," or "If I'm going to get my daughter to do anything, I've got to constantly push her to get it done.")

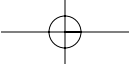
Proverbs 29:22 reminds us that "an angry man stirs up strife and a hot tempered man abounds in aggression." How does your misuse of anger stir up strife in your kids once they see your anger on display? (For instance, "My son won't say a word, but I know he's thinking defiant thoughts," or "My daughter may break down in tears and protest that I just don't understand.")

Recognizing that Rita was flustered because she seemed too easily prone toward anger, Dr. Carter wanted to ease her harsh self-assessment: "You're not wrong or out of place to be feeling what you feel. Virtually any parent is going to dislike having to monitor two sons who seem to bicker constantly. If anything, you take the first step toward taming your anger when you admit that you feel it. It's hard to make healthy adjustments without first being keenly aware of its presence."

To help you begin learning how to handle anger wisely as a parent, let's first get a good idea of some of the many ways it can be shown. Look over this list and determine which responses are common in you and which are common in your children. You might place the appropriate initials beside the behaviors that fit with each family member.

- ___ Impatience over matters of presumed urgency
- ___ Open griping and complaining
- ___ Sulking and withdrawal
- ___ Offering rebuttals while not really showing understanding



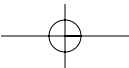


- ___ Doing the opposite of what is expected (“I’ll show you”)
- ___ Easy or regular criticizing
- ___ Verbal expressions of annoyance and displeasure
- ___ Speaking in an adversarial tone of voice
- ___ Being persuasive or coercive
- ___ Name calling or character assassination
- ___ Having to be right, even when it promotes friction
- ___ Displays of an “I don’t care” attitude
- ___ Use of sarcasm
- ___ Unwillingness to hear a differing perspective
- ___ Inability to accept those who have erred
- ___ Chronic stubbornness
- ___ A habit of quitting
- ___ Holding onto a grudge
- ___ Speaking ill of people behind their back
- ___ Pushing ideas or preferences in an overbearing manner

It’s quite a list! Which of these forms of anger are most common in yourself?

Which of these forms of anger would your children say are most common in you?

Which of these forms of anger are most common in your children?



Rita commented to Dr. Carter: “It’s interesting to see how each of us in our family handles anger differently. Each of us has moments when we speak sharply or we get pulled into an adversarial style. I’ve noticed, though, that Ashton tends to try to keep a strong upper hand both against his little brother and against me. He can be the stubbornest person in the house as he’ll just tune the rest of us out and do whatever he wants, knowing full well that he’s creating friction. I actually think he enjoys it.”

“How does this influence the rest of you?” asked Dr. Carter.

“Well, Ryan can’t be quiet. He’ll pitch a flying fit when his brother belittles him, and he’s very capable of pestering his brother and me until he gets his way. If things don’t unfold as he likes, then he goes into a meltdown and he’ll sulk.

“Me, I’m all over the place with my anger,” Rita continued. “Sometimes I’ll shout at the boys, sometimes I’ll ignore them and tell them to work it out without me. Sometimes I get hooked lecturing them, but that only turns into a loud debate. I wish my husband would take more of a lead in addressing these situations, but he’s a conflict-avoider. He’ll withdraw, and some days we won’t hear from him for hours at a time.”

Wanting to teach some positive skills, Dr. Carter said, “It’s easy to conclude that methods of handling anger in your home leave much to be desired. Let’s look beyond the ineffective methods of communication, though, and see if we can find anything right or good about the anger.”

“Good?” came Rita’s reaction. “You’re suggesting there is something good in all this?”

“That’s what I’m suggesting,” replied the doctor. “Let’s go down to the very core of your anger and determine what you’re really trying to accomplish. If you could focus on the bottom-line message that is pushing your anger, it would help you determine how to communicate it more effectively.”

The Purpose of Anger

Sure enough, anger can seem like an ugly, troublesome emotion having no place in a home that is trying to achieve peace or cooperation. Parents

are often so focused on the poor behavior that accompanies anger that they miss the legitimate message spurring it in the first place. Let's not overlook the fact, though, that you might have something *right* to say in your anger. Likewise, though your children may not behave in a desirable way, amid all their anger there may be a legitimate message that needs to get out.

Think for a moment about what you are trying to accomplish each time you have anger to express. Undoubtedly, at the instant you feel angry, you are sensing that there is something not right in your environment. You are feeling ignored, dismissed, criticized, misunderstood, or rejected. Your anger, then, is acting as a push toward self-preservation. You want to be taken seriously. You want to feel that your voice is heard. Your anger could be understood as a motivation to do something to correct the things that are wrong.

Ephesians 4:26 indicates that there are certainly times when your anger can be an appropriate response ("Be angry, but without sin"). When your anger is triggered by one of your children, what is the valid message you want to communicate at that very moment? (For instance, "When my daughter whines time and again about time limits for the phone, I want her to respect my decisions and to recognize that I'm being reasonable," or "Whenever my son ignores me, I want him to show me some respect.")

Can you recognize that your anger is spurred by a good goal? Though your methods may not always be the best, there is legitimacy in your message.

Now shift gears. You may not like the way your son or daughter expresses anger or acts defiantly, yet are you willing to acknowledge that the child may also have something legitimate pushing his or her anger? For instance, Ashton would express anger toward his younger brother, Ryan, because he did not respect his desire to use the computer. As their arguments over such matters escalated into ugly exchanges, it would become evident that disrespect was flying back and forth between the two boys. Their discussion would quickly deteriorate into ugly accusations, and then

finally Ashton would speak in agitation to his mother about the situation. Even if Ashton was less than pleasant in presenting his arguments, he still might have an understandable concern. (So might Ryan, for that matter.)

Think of some common incidents when your children express anger. Even if they do a poor job communicating it, what might be reasonable about what they feel? (For instance, “My son complains that he doesn’t get to do as much with his friends as he would like. I realize that peer acceptance is very important to him and he’s indicating that he wants to feel accepted,” or “When my daughter balks at having to do homework, it’s understandable that she might be feeling burned out with so many assignments.”)

Sometimes anger can be pushed along by sheer selfishness or insensitivity (more on that in later chapters), but there is often a message at the base of each person’s anger that deserves to be heard. Be willing to stand firmly in your own legitimate anger, and be willing to search out the reasonable message behind the child’s anger.

Anger Defined

Ultimately, anger is the emotion of self-preservation. Whether it is handled cleanly or insensitively, the angry person is motivated to preserve one of three things: personal worth, perceived needs, or basic convictions. Let’s break these down one by one to get a more thorough understanding of anger’s purpose.

Preserving Personal Worth

As Rita interacted with her two sons, she often entertained the thought, *These boys are showing me very little respect, and I’m tired of it!* Not only was it reasonable to desire respect from them, it was also reasonable for

her to teach them to honor her and one another in their communication. In fact, it would be irresponsible for her *not* to address the issue of her personal worth when her boys showed disrespect.

Dr. Carter explained to Rita, “Don’t apologize for wanting to stand up for your worth. A central truth in the Christian message is that each person has God-given value. We are each at our most effective state when we recognize the fact that we are highly prized by God. If each of us feels capable of standing upon that value and if we recognize it in others, our communications will be rewarding. Your home is a laboratory where you and your sons are conducting experiments in human relations. They will take those experiments into the world, so it’s good for them to learn that respect and worth need to be acknowledged.”

In your home, how is your anger linked to your drive to preserve personal worth and respect? (For instance, “I want my kids to realize that people in leadership and authority deserve to be given proper consideration,” or “They can learn that the best way to be treated in a worthy manner is to treat others that way first.”)

Let’s turn the tables. Your children may not be sophisticated yet in managing their frustrations, but they too seek respect when feeling anger. How is their anger a cry to be treated as a person of worth? (For instance, “When my daughter gripes about our limits regarding her way of dressing, she’s indicating that she wants us to see her as one who deserves trust,” or “My son thinks I’m invalidating his worth when I veto his decision to go out with friends I don’t think are good for him.”)

It is quite easy to focus on the immaturity or irresponsibility of your kids’ reasoning. Parents easily make the mistake of getting drawn into arguments about kids’ poor choices in behavior or priorities, ignoring their

hunger to be upheld as worthy. This only increases the anger because the young person feels invalidated. To defuse the building anger, it is helpful to focus on the need beneath the anger rather than the poor behavior that accompanies it.

Rita had a potential problem on her hands one day when Ryan was especially insistent that he should be allowed to see a movie she did not believe to be appropriate. “You always say no to everything,” came his exaggerated complaint. “My friends’ parents aren’t nearly as strict on them. Why can’t I do what they get to do . . . just once?”

Her normal reply might have been to argue the merits of the movie or to defend her style of parenting. But remembering the discussion about anger being linked to the drive for worth, she chose another route: “Ryan, I’m beginning to realize just how important it is for you to feel like you fit in with your friends. That makes sense to me. I’m still not in favor of the movie, but let’s talk about how we can handle our priorities so you won’t feel so left out.”

Ryan was still annoyed at her decision, but his mother persisted in showing him that she would explore further options regarding peer involvement. It did not erase *all* of his anger at that moment, but she was establishing herself as one who would take his desire for acceptance seriously.

In the same manner, you too can respond differently to your child’s anger by focusing less on the errant demand and more on the cry for respect that lies behind the anger. How might this transform your reaction to your child’s anger? (For instance, “I’d argue less about how right I am, and I would focus more on why my daughter feels hurt,” or “I’d see my son’s anger as an opportunity to learn what’s really going on deep inside.”)

Preserving Legitimate Needs

We humans are interdependent. As we attempt to build lives of satisfaction, our chances for success increase if we recognize each other’s

normal needs and work together in a spirit of cooperation. Certainly a family system presents many occasions where cooperation can greatly improve the quality of life for each member.

Whenever family members experience anger, there is a strong likelihood that the angry one is thinking, *You don't care at all about my needs, and I wish I could correct that problem.*

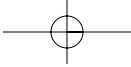
Consider some of the simple needs that exist in ordinary family interaction:

- The need for coordination in chores and domestic duties
- The need for encouragement and friendliness
- The need to protect and care for personal properties
- The need to respect schedules and time requirements
- The need for wisdom regarding money management
- The need for helpfulness during times of illness or duress
- The need to respect individual uniqueness or differentness
- The need for courtesy
- The need to maintain satisfactory ties with friends and extended family
- The need for spiritual growth and stimulation

As you think about your needs as a parent, which ones stand out most? (For instance, "I need my kids to recognize that they are not the only ones who use the phone," or "I need them to coordinate schedules with me.")

Dr. Carter explained to Rita: "When you're angry with your sons, you're probably feeling at that moment that they show low regard for the needs that are part of your daily routine. The anger may be expressed as impatience or annoyance, but at the base of your emotion can be a perfectly normal desire."

"I've never really thought much about what I'm trying to accomplish with my anger," she admitted. "All I know is that when I'm ticked off, I just feel like I'm trying to light a fire under my boys, or I'm just playing



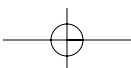
referee.” Then she reflected, “You know, now that you’ve pointed it out, I can see how my anger is tied to the fact that my needs are lacking.”

When your needs are ignored by one of your kids, why do you so regularly respond with irritability or frustration? (For instance, “Forcefulness seems to be the only way I can get my son to cooperate,” or “I’m constantly exasperated because no one in my home seems to realize that I have needs too.”)

As you observe how your kids behave with little regard for your needs, it is easy to dismiss their anger as wrong. Are you willing to recognize that in their emotion they too are feeling their needs are not being addressed? Through the years, it is part of your task as a parent to help them distinguish true needs from selfish wants. Nonetheless, rather than focusing strictly on their poor behavior you can indicate that you recognize their perceived needs. This effort falls in line with the instruction given in James 1:19, which states that we do best when we are “quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.” Listening for the purpose of deciphering your child’s needs can go a long way toward defusing the tension that accompanies their emotion.

What needs do your kids seem to feel are not adequately addressed in your home? (For instance, “My daughter has a high need for social stimulation, so when I restrict access to her friends she feels that need is being slighted,” or “My son thinks he needs the latest computer stuff, and he gets ticked off when he senses that I’m not cooperating with him.”)

Parents make a major mistake in trying to convince their young that their needs are not warranted. In many cases, the parents may actually



be correct to recognize that kids can feel convinced their needs are of the utmost importance, when in fact they are not. It is common knowledge that selfish motives or a feeling of entitlement can drive young people as they communicate their preferences and desires. Knowing this, parents may feel it is their task to immediately correct the child's feelings, explaining how their demands are unreasonable. The result is almost always an ugly standoff between parent and child.

Dr. Carter spoke with Rita about how to address her sons' needs. "The first rule when you address your sons' anger is that you not invalidate their perceived needs, no matter how off-base they may seem to be. Before you address the matter at hand, you can help diffuse the anger by indicating that you're willing to consider the feelings they're expressing."

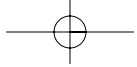
As an example, Ryan came to his mother agitated and complaining that Ashton was being rude as he (Ryan) was spending time with his (Ryan's) friends: "Why does he think he can just come along and take over whenever my friends are here to see me? I hate it when he's so selfish that he can't just leave us alone."

In the past, Rita would have scolded him for feeling hate, and she might have told him to quit complaining and get a better attitude. But this time, she used a more understanding approach: "Ryan, I hear that you need time to develop your friendships in your own manner without your brother's interference. That makes sense to me. Let's talk about how we can accomplish that with the least amount of arguing."

Before you correct your kids' errant displays of anger, choose to speak to the unmet need that is driving the emotion. Once that is accomplished, the probability increases that the rest of your message will be heard.

Preserving Basic Convictions

In addition to preserving worth and needs, anger is linked to preserving our most basic convictions. When you feel angry, there is almost always a core belief that has not been upheld. In expressing anger, you are indicating that you cannot sit idly as you observe others living contrary to what you know is right.

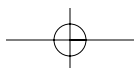


Consider some of the fundamental convictions that tend to arouse people's anger:

- Family members and friends should honor human decency.
- Lying has no place in a growing relationship.
- Punctuality and cleanliness are reflections of respect for others.
- Foul language taints constructive communication.
- It is wise and good to apologize and say "I was wrong."
- A critical spirit poisons a relationship. Encouragement is greatly preferred.
- One person cannot shoulder the entire load required to run a household. Teamwork is essential.
- It is rude to invalidate someone's feelings or perceptions.
- It is necessary to manage money wisely, as opposed to spending it frivolously.
- Time spent with extended family members must be balanced with the needs of the immediate family.

As you contemplate the convictions that spur you toward expression of anger, which stand out as most common? (For instance, "You have to consider how others feel before you make a decision affecting their lives," or "When a parent speaks, a child shouldn't be allowed to simply stare at the TV and ignore what is being said.")

What is right about holding to your convictions? (For instance, "I believe that it's the parents' job to teach relationship skills to the kids," or "I want my son to grow up with a defined set of values.")

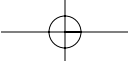


It is vital for you to maintain good convictions, but it is also possible to go too far to the extent that stubbornness, rigidity, or condemnation results. Angry parents often have excellent beliefs to instill in their young ones, but the method can be so condescending or insulting that the legitimate message is lost. We Christians can be quite vulnerable to this problem because we *know* right from wrong and we feel that we are being disloyal to our values if we are seen as soft. For example, Rita recognized that she wanted to instill the value of a cooperative spirit in her two sons. As she admitted, though, “I feel a strong obligation to make sure my kids are brought up with the right principles. But sometimes I speak with such exasperation in my voice that their only thought is to get away from me. They don’t hear what really needs to be heard.”

How about you? How might you stand up for your convictions, but in a manner that sabotages the message? (For instance, “When I explain to my daughter how she needs to be orderly with her things in the house, I’m using such a sharp tone of voice that she feels unaccepted by me,” or “I tell my son he needs to appreciate the value of a good day’s work, but he gets the message that I just think he is lazy and has no redeeming value.”)

Be willing to acknowledge that your children have convictions, too, when they feel angry. Although their use of anger may not be fully mature, are you willing to go behind the scenes and address the conviction? For example, Dr. Carter said to Rita: “On several occasions you’ve mentioned how Ryan becomes upset when his older brother taunts him or interferes with his friendships. Sure enough, I’m guessing that Ryan may sound whiny when he complains, but let’s take the time to determine the convictions he’s holding onto.”

Rita thought for a moment and then stated: “I know that Ryan’s big issue is fairness. He really is pretty conscientious about respecting separate property or priorities. Ashton, on the other hand, has the attitude that



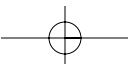
he can claim anything that belongs to his brother as if it's his, too. Ryan becomes flustered when his brother doesn't share the same conviction."

Even as Rita needed to guide Ryan in learning to communicate his anger more constructively, it was good to help her son see that he had beliefs worth listening to. She correctly reasoned that Ryan would be more open to her guidance once he recognized that she could acknowledge that he had a reasonable conviction that deserved attention.

When your children become angry, be willing to look beyond the poor method of communication so as to find the convictions that drive it. What convictions seem most commonly associated with your kids' anger? (For instance, "When my daughter gripes about having to do homework, she's holding to the belief that her teen years should consist of more than just boring assignments," or "When my son is angry at his girlfriend, it's because loyalty means more to him than it does to her.")

Whether or not you agree wholly with your child's convictions, are you willing to openly acknowledge them for the purpose of having a constructive conversation? How do you suppose this can change the way anger is managed in your home? (For instance, "In our home, no one seems to feel understood, but I would change that by offering my understanding," or "Instead of rebutting with my opinions, I could slow down and let my daughter explain her opinions more fully.")

The beginning point of managing anger fairly in your home is to recognize that it is often driven by something legitimate. Because most of us, though, tend to be too negative or insensitive when we communicate anger, it is easy to dismiss anger as invalid. Before doing so, ask yourself:



- What is reasonable about my anger, and how can I adjust my method of communication so that the viable message is more digestible?
- What is it that my child is communicating in his or her anger that I need to be more attentive to?
- Can we make room for the fact that anger exists in our home and agree to address it in a manner consistent with the deeper issue of Godly love?

In the next two chapters, we begin to explore the many options you have, both good and bad, for handling anger. Then we go deeper by examining the reasons we opt for poor choices over constructive choices.



For Family Discussion

1. Reexamine the many ways in which anger can be expressed, as listed earlier in this chapter. One by one, have each family member identify the top three or four ways they display anger. Then let each person give feedback to one another regarding how they can tell when the other family members are angry.
2. Let all the family members identify their own needs and convictions they wish the rest of the family would consistently respect.
3. Let each family member have a turn being the focus person. The rest of the family has the assignment of identifying what is probably legitimate about the focus person's experiences of anger.
4. Being as constructive as possible, go back to each family member one at a time and let the rest of the family take turns offering suggestions as to how each person can communicate legitimate anger more appropriately.
5. Once again, take turns focusing one at a time on each individual. Have each member of the group express to the focus person how he or she is willing to ease that person's anger by choosing to hear what is being said when anger is expressed.

For Further Reflection

Ephesians 4:26 states, “Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.” Let’s break this verse down for further thought.

1. Since the Bible states that we may be angry, there are times when this emotion has an appropriate purpose. When is your anger as a parent appropriate? What might be appropriate about the anger felt by your children?
2. Anger is to be managed without sin. What attitudes or behaviors might accompany your anger, turning it into a sinful response? How does the “sin nature” influence the way your children respond when they feel angry?
3. By not letting the sun go down on your anger, the Scripture presumes that anger can be managed in an immediate time frame; it does not have to linger. When does this instruction prove to be difficult in your home? What causes anger to linger overnight, perhaps for days or even weeks at a time? How do the family priorities need to change to keep anger from lingering too long?

James 1:19 states, “Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”

4. Being slow to anger does not mean that anger should be eliminated, but managed judiciously. How can you determine if you as a parent are being slow and judicious in handling your anger?
5. How is the anger of your children affected if you choose to be quicker to hear? What do they want you to know about their feelings?

Proverbs 29:22 reminds us: “An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot tempered man abounds in transgression.”

6. When does anger cross the line and become destructive? Why do you allow your anger to become a strife-producing communication? Why are your children willing to engage in such an exchange of anger?