

How Your Anger Is Really Impacting Your Children

I am long familiar with the **Golden Rule**, yet it's only in the last month that I've thought of it particularly in terms of my children—not treating them as they are but as I would have them be. As often is the case, God used my son's little secular hippie preschool to bring this home for me.

At a **parent** meeting, the speaker asked parents their main concerns for their children's behavior right now. Parents yelled out things like **sibling rivalry**, **angry tantrums**, hitting, general snotty attitudes and so forth. Then she asked what **character qualities** we hoped they'd have when they headed to college.

The group suggested **empathy**, **perseverance** and **self-confidence**, among others. As a believer, I would add **grace**, **service** and **love**. I really want my boys to have personal confidence in who they are in **Christ** that equips them to extend grace to others. I want them to love as 1 Corinthians 13 defines it—with patience, with a long fuse, not rude, not keeping a record of wrongs, giving the benefit of the doubt and so on. I want them to **serve** like Christ.

Then the speaker led us in an exercise. She said, "Put your feet squarely on the floor." She did it, and we did too. "Sit up straight." She modeled, and we did it too. "Touch your thumb and first finger in an OK sign."

We did it with her. "Put the OK sign on your chin." But she put hers on her cheek. And every last one of us in the room without thinking put ours on our cheek too. She had made her point effectively. We say we want one thing with our kids, but so often we model something else. And they will always pick up what we model over what we say.

God got my attention. My son has an **anger problem** because I have an anger problem that I have well modeled for him. And

when I get angry at him because he got angry and threw a toy, I'm not helping anything. Apart from Scripture, my default belief system is that when he sins, I need to get really angry in proportion to the seriousness of the offense—that the angrier I get, the more effective it will be at deterring him from doing it again.

The only problem is that my anger is *not* a deterrent to him doing it again. It just models anger for him and educates him in more sophisticated ways to act on it. That's not how God transforms me, and it's not how He intends me to disciple my children.

Here are Jesus' instructions from Luke 6:

“And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (vv. 31-36).

As I wish that my boys would do to me and others, I should do to them—not do to them in a reactionary response to what they just did. It's my job to break the cycle of act and react. I should just *act*. Stay on course. Love. Grace. Compassion. Endurance. Act on my vision of what I want them to be, and model consistently for them my end goal.

My angry little boy sure can make me angry. But my job in Christ is to stop the cycle, correct him and model for him with my life as well as my words a new and better way through gospel grace to deal with conflict.

Of course, the Golden Rule transcends child-rearing. I had just never thought of it in those specific terms. It applies

to my children, my husband, my friends and my enemies. Do to them not in reaction to what they just did to me, but do to them with a vision of where God is calling them. And that is the essence of being salt and light in the places God has called me to function.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup**'s blog, . Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*