

Appendix XII
Essay On Irritability
by Jerry Wragg

The only kind of anger that achieves Kingdom purposes is *righteous* anger. This is anger at the things that offend God. Though we can't demonstrate anger perfectly like God does, we **can** become so filled with His truth that we see the offenses of others through His frame of reference. This is especially crucial for parents when it comes to how they deal with their children. Parents many times become angry due to selfishness in their own hearts, desiring to have life in the home a certain way. When it doesn't happen, the result is often anger and abusive words.

Abusive words are a violation of Eph. 4:29, and include any word that does not build up another person. Ask yourself (and your children as well) questions like: "Are these words tearing down or building up?" "How does that phrase build up the life of the person you just said it to?"

James 1:20 teaches that sinful anger accomplishes nothing for God's purposes. Deep resentment *will not* accomplish godly ends. Galatians 4:16 describes this kind of attitude as something your enemy would exhibit. A parent is not to act like the enemy of their child.

Parents may need to firmly tell their children that sin will ruin their lives...that sin, if left to itself, will cause them to be a fool...that sin is despicable in the sight of God. We must, through loving discipline and a constant call to repentance, drive the foolishness "far from them" (Prov. 22:15). But if you express these truths through abusive words and an angry disposition, you may drive your child to hopelessness instead.

Children know when a parent is not walking according to the Scriptures. They know when a parent is not submitting themselves to the truth of God's Word. And the older they get, the more keenly aware of it they are.

Subtle forms of anger are just as dangerous. An irritable person is someone who cannot tolerate inconveniences in their life. It is foolish to think that, in all your years of parenting, there won't be something in your life that is an inconvenience.

Life's inconveniences are allowed by God so that we are strengthened and encouraged...so that we grow. God is at work, and certainly He's using our children in our lives for that purpose. When we are irritable, we are demonstrating a lack of trust in God's sovereignty and His ability to use our trials in our sanctification.

If you want to keep from exasperating your children, and if you want to be the kind of parent who's open to how life unfolds on a daily basis, then stop demanding fair

treatment from life. Don't do it at work, don't do it at home. Don't do with your friends, don't do it at church. Don't do it in your personal relationships. Don't demand fair treatment. Life is in many ways, very unfair. That's just the way it is. Thankfully, because of God's grace, we don't get what we deserve. In Christ, we have received mercy. Let's not demand fair treatment from life, but rather be grateful, especially for the faith-building inconveniences that come with having a family.

When you've had a long and arduous day at work, pray about the time you anticipate having at home with the children. You say, "But I've been in the thick of the battle at work. Am I not entitled to some 'unwinding' time?" This is a common point of tension which often results in conflict and outbursts of anger. Parents believe that their hard work on behalf of their loved ones has earned them a well-deserved break. The problem here isn't the desire for rest, but the expectation that life should *serve* them their proper due.

The fact is, such expectations are unnecessary in light of God's unfolding purposes. Sometimes the Lord affords us the opportunity to rest (Ps. 127:2), and at other times He allows rest to be crowded out by the demands of life (Ecc. 2:23). Most of the time, active and growing children have innumerable questions and concerns which need parental attention. And this says nothing of the time and energy it takes to cultivate a marriage relationship. It is extremely helpful, therefore, to pray and prepare your heart for what is to come, subjecting yourself to God's plan as it unfolds

Build a habit of looking at every challenge as from the Lord. Psalm 119:75 says, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous and that in faithfulness Thou has afflicted me." The Lord brings with his gentle hands certain issues in life that afflict us. And it's important that we embrace them so that we don't become irritable people. Irritability is really just internal anger that hasn't found its fullest expression visibly. It's the kind of attitude that says, "Nothing is to inconvenience me today. I don't want the impingement of family, children, or anything else bothering me." This text helps us to prepare for life's trials by reminding us that God is faithful, even when He afflicts us. Note also verse 67 in this Psalm: "Before I was afflicted, I went astray." You need the affliction. I need the affliction.

When you come home and your children are demanding all this time and attention, you don't need to be irritable. You can simply say, "Lord, You're unfolding a plan right now." Does this mean that the home should never be a place of rest? Does this mean there should never be any requirements placed on children to help make it so? Certainly not. As a parent, you can manage your house as you like. Just make sure your rules honor Jesus Christ and that they are for a specific purpose. Take care to avoid cultivating a lifestyle that constantly expresses selfishness to your family.

Before you attempt to cultivate a relaxed environment in the home, first cultivate in your own heart a willingness and ability to find spiritual refreshment no matter what

the situation is in life. And then when you come home and one of your children says, “Dad, I need to talk to you about an issue right now,” you’ll be able to find spiritual refreshment in serving him that way. It’s a terrible mistake if you don’t. Prepare yourself for those scenarios; they happen all the time.

Verse 77 of Psalm 119 is a wonderful encouragement: “May Thy compassion come to me that I may live.” This refers to the vitality found in the Lord’s lovingkindness. As we sacrifice our own desires and plans in service to others, including ministry to each other in the home, the Lord revives us with His compassion. So refuse to become irritable. And you’ll be blessed by the Lord as He uses your afflictions to make you more like Himself.