

# Tempering Our Tempers

*May we rise up and be men and women of God, mastering our tempers so that peace and love may abound in our homes.*

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As I have taught marriage and family courses and read papers in which students recount their relationships with their parents, it has become obvious over the years that anger, if uncontrolled, can be a great destroyer of marriage and family relationships. The sin of anger (see Joseph Smith Translation, Ephesians 4:26) not only harms relationships but also corrodes character.

I can think of no positive context for displaying anger, though certainly righteous indignation and the righting of wrongs can be justified. The scriptures indicate that *undisciplined* anger is always cankerous and destructive. It is one of Satan's primary tools for destroying marriages and family relations.

The Lord has referred to Satan as "the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another" (3 Nephi 11:29). The Savior declared to the Nephites, "Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things *should be done away*" (3 Nephi 11:30; emphasis added).

## **Replacing Anger with Encouragement**

One class assignment I give to my students is to write a paper on their family background. Specifically, I ask them to describe their parents' strengths, weaknesses, and marriage. Perhaps the most common negative dimension of family life mentioned in student papers is the father's temper, though bad tempers aren't restricted to fathers. Even when fathers are active in Church callings, read scriptures with the family, and give service to others, some still struggle to control their anger.

Of course children see fathers (and mothers) as more temperamental because of the need for parents to discipline children, and few youngsters, at the time, thank their parents for correction. But college-age students look back with more objectivity at their home life and appraise both the good and the bad. Many admit that they wish their parents had been stricter with them! However, many carry scars from events that happened at an early age.

One young woman recalled that her father often yelled, threatened, and severely spanked his children. If one of the children did something wrong during the day, all of them would hide when their father returned from work.

Contrast this with the approach taken by the father of President Gordon B. Hinckley: "I will be forever grateful for a father who never laid a hand in anger upon his children," said President Hinckley. "Somehow he had the wonderful talent to let them know what was expected of them and to give them encouragement in achieving it."<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on the lasting impact fathers have on their children, President Hinckley added: "I am persuaded that



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violent fathers produce violent sons. I am satisfied that such punishment in most instances does more damage than good. Children don't need beating. They need love and encouragement. They need fathers to whom they can look with respect rather than fear. Above all, they need example."<sup>2</sup>

Regarding fathers who set aside self-discipline and become abusive when they lose their tempers, President Hinckley warned: "No man who engages in such evil and unbecoming behavior is worthy of the priesthood of God. No man who so conducts himself is worthy of the privileges of the house of the Lord. I regret that there are some men undeserving of the love of their wives and children. There are children who fear their fathers, and wives who fear their husbands."<sup>3</sup>

President Hinckley has called such fathers to repentance. "Discipline yourselves. Master your temper," he said. "Most of the things that make you angry are of very small consequence. And what a terrible price you are paying for your anger. Ask the Lord to forgive you. Ask your wife to forgive you. Apologize to your children."<sup>4</sup>

#### **The Power of a Righteous Example**

Now consider the kind of exemplary behavior that prompted one young man to write the following about his father:

"I have never ever heard my father curse. To me this is a great source of strength because my father is my greatest living example

of how to live a good Latter-day Saint life. Having had such a good example to follow makes all the little decisions in life all that much easier. When I catch myself doing things that I saw my father do, I am even more thankful for a righteous father who lived the gospel of Jesus Christ every single day. I will forever be in the debt of my dad for showing me the way that Christ would have lived."

Fathers have immense influence on their children. How blessed is the son or daughter who has a father who cares, teaches, chastens with love, and influences his children to become better people, better husbands or wives, better fathers or mothers. Temper does not engender feelings of love and trust in the hearts of the recipients of anger. Instead, it generates heartache and memories of an unpleasant childhood that are too often passed on to the next generation.

#### **Mastery of Temper**

So how does someone who struggles with anger learn self-discipline? The world would try to help people conquer their tempers by setting up some kind of behavior modification program that might take years and yet produce only marginal results. But the Lord and the prophets tell us that we already know how to control anger. The problem of anger results from not understanding and applying the doctrines of the gospel. President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said: "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior."<sup>5</sup>

The doctrine of repentance specifically applies to the sin of anger; it can bring the





healing power of the Atonement into our lives. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “You can change anything you want to change and you can do it very fast. That’s another Satanic sucker-punch—that it takes years and years and eons of eternity to repent. It takes exactly as long to repent as it takes you to say ‘I’ll change’—and mean it. Of course there will be problems to work out and restitutions to make. You may well spend—indeed you had better spend—the rest of your life proving your repentance by its permanence. But change, growth, renewal, repentance can come for you as instantaneously as it did for Alma and the Sons of Mosiah.”<sup>6</sup>

Speaking about controlling anger, President Hinckley has taught: “Who can calculate the wounds inflicted, their depth and pain, by harsh and mean words spoken in anger? How pitiful a sight is a man who is strong in many ways but who loses all control of himself when some little thing, usually of no significant consequence, disturbs his equanimity. In every marriage there are, of course, occasional differences. But I find no justification for tempers that explode on the slightest provocation. . . .

“A violent temper is such a terrible, corrosive thing. And the tragedy is that it accomplishes no good; it only feeds evil with resentment and rebellion and pain. To any man or boy within the sound of my voice who has trouble controlling his tongue, may I suggest that you plead with the Lord for the strength to overcome your weakness, that you apologize to those you have offended, and that you marshal within yourselves the power to discipline your tongue.”<sup>7</sup>

Young people are perceptive and greatly affected by their parents’ example. May we rise up and be men and women of God, mastering our tempers so that peace and love may abound in our homes. The most important aspect of parenting is for a couple to have a good marriage and to set an example of love and patience for their children. The mastery of temper will pay dividends now and in the years ahead as children make homes and families of their own. ■

#### NOTES

1. “Save the Children,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 53.
2. *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 53.
3. “Women of the Church,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 68.
4. *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 68.
5. “Do Not Fear,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, May 2004, 79.
6. “For Times of Trouble,” *New Era*, Oct. 1980, 11–12; see *Tambuli*, Jan. 1982, 9.
7. “Our Solemn Responsibilities,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 50–51.