



"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."—John 17:17

Volume 11 Number 9

October/November 2009

What Is Truth?

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What Is Truth?

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JESUS IS DRAGGED BEFORE THE ROMAN GOVERNOR Pontius Pilate. Jewish leaders accuse Him of committing treason against Rome by proclaiming Himself a king.

Pilate says to Jesus, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answers, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Pilate replies, "What is truth?" (John 18:28-38).

"What is truth?" Pilate may have said this sarcastically. He may have been stating a rhetorical question, since he and Jesus were engaged in a somewhat philosophical discussion. Or it may have been a weary comment from a disillusioned man who had become hopeless and cynical. No matter, this question is vital to anyone who wishes to find reason and purpose to life.



“What is truth?” We live in a society in which truth is seen as relative. A common argument is, “What might be ‘true’ for you may not be ‘true’ for me. After all, ‘truth’ is based on personal feelings and to deny the validity of feelings is to be narrow-minded and bigoted.”

Increasingly, in our society if someone doesn’t accept the “truth” of the subjective, personal experience of the homosexual as virtuous then he is “homophobic,” a word implying mental illness. It wasn’t that long ago that homosexual behavior was viewed by most Christians as

unnatural and immoral.

Truth has become synonymous with tolerance. Many today deny the biblical truth that sexual experimentation before marriage is biologically and emotionally unhealthy. They claim that the biblical view is, at best, Victorian and, at worst, trying to suppress nature itself. The biblical teaching that human sexuality is to be reserved for marriage is looked down upon as intolerant.

Truth has become synonymous with tolerance.

But is subjective experience the only determinate of reality? If a person truly believes he can stop a runaway train with his bare hands does his belief create reality, or does he jump on the tracks and get run over by the train?

“What is truth?”

Revolutionary ideas of truth

Many of the concepts of truth found in the postmodern world are rooted in three revolutionary ideas of the 19th century.

The first powerful concept is evolution—the theory that all life, including humankind, is the outcome of a natural, mindless progression from lower to more complicated forms of life. Evolution removes the need for a Creator and makes science the arbiter of truth.

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A second philosophy that has shaped the thinking of many Europeans, and more people in the United States than most would like to admit, is communism. The effects of the teachings of Karl Marx on Western society are greater than many realize, especially in our institutions of higher learning. The political system called communism appears to have failed in Eastern Europe, but many of its philosophies are alive and well.

Marx once said, “Society is not based on the law... Rather, law must be based on society... Any attempted assertion of the eternal validity of laws continually clashes with present needs.”

This concept sees rules and boundaries as only the means to an end. There is no absolute truth, only the shifting sand of moral relativism with the agenda of the state being the ultimate good.

The effects of the teachings of Karl Marx on Western society are greater than many realize, especially in our institutions of higher learning.

Marx also referred to religion as the opium of the people. He wrote, “The basis of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion; religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man’s self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself or has lost himself again... The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, the embryonic criticism of this vale of tears of which religion is the halo... It is the task of history, therefore, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world.”

A third powerful influence is psychoanalysis. This doesn’t mean that there aren’t good therapists helping people deal with emotional problems and mental illness, but it is difficult to underestimate the antibiblical impact some in this field have perpetrated on our society. Many popular psychological theories promote premises that see human beings only in biological terms. They ignore the biblical revelation that many human emotional problems are rooted in spiritual sickness.

Christianity has also been influenced by these philosophical trends; and in some cases, Christians have been leading the way. It’s not unusual for religious leaders in today’s world to see the Bible as anachronistic, at best; others see it as downright oppressive. Christian churches once claimed to be the beacons of biblical truth. What happened?

Absolute truth

True Christianity is based on the belief that there is absolute truth. When we look at the Bible, we discover a number of principles about truth:

- 1.
2. Truth is absolute by the will of God. God not only reveals Himself as the one true God, but also as the God who determines what is true and false. Jesus says in John 4:23, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” If we really want to discover truth, we must be willing to believe that it is the Creator who determines truth from falsehood—not our own emotions or intellectual theories.
3. Evil, or sin, is the enemy of truth. The biblical definition of sin outlines what is false and hurtful to human beings. Truth is an understanding of reality that ultimately determines thoughts, morality and actions.
4. Truth is revealed by God in the life of Christ and in the word of Scripture. In John 17:17 Christ prayed, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”



Moral truth is contained, then, in moral teachings, or law, given by God. Some of these laws are discovered, lost and rediscovered in various cultures from generation to generation. Since these laws define the reality of life as ordained by the Creator, they exist whether we acknowledge them or not. The consequences of sin are just as inescapable whether committed knowingly or in ignorance.

Christian churches once claimed to be the beacons of biblical truth. What happened?

The foundation of the law is God Himself. By trusting in Him and acting according to what He has commanded, we don't have to experience the painful effects of sin.

Jesus said, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

This simple teaching by Jesus Christ forms the basis of all truth. There is a choice between simply going on the way you have been and turning towards God. It's up to you.

Further reading

Learn more about the truth found in god's Word by reading our free booklets [Is the Bible True?](#)

Resisting the Roaring Lion

By John LaBissoniere

Fear—that raw emotion of dread, terror, fright or panic—can be pervasive. If uncontrolled, fear can drown out reason, facts and faith. Can it be defeated?



LATE ONE NIGHT, I WAS WALKING ALONE down the middle of a moonlit street. It was quiet and still, and the houses were dark. No one was outside and not a single car was moving. Suddenly, I heard a strange noise behind me. Looking back I saw a huge lion rushing madly toward me from about a half block away! Fear gripped me and I began to run.



With my heart pounding, I sensed the beast was gaining on me. In panic I rushed through the front yard gate of an old house and hurdled up the stairs to the porch. Glancing back, I saw the lion racing through the gate! Pushing open the front door I scrambled up some stairs to the second floor. Looking down I saw the fierce creature charging up the steps. Dashing down a hallway, I found a large old trunk, dove inside it and quickly closed the lid. Seconds later it reopened. It was the lion! His mouth was wide open! And then...I woke up.

Yes, it was a terrible dream, a frightening nightmare I experienced as a child. Not only did I occasionally endure bad dreams as a youngster, but various fears also troubled me. I was afraid that wild bears were under my bed at night. I was scared to go into the basement alone, thinking that a monster might grab me before I could get back upstairs.

Religion also added to my childhood fears. I attended a church service on Sundays with my family. I was warned that if I ever missed a service, God might send me to the blazing flames of hell when I died. Naturally I dreaded this terrifying consequence, especially after seeing artists' renderings of a sinister red devil with his evil eyes, horned head and razor-sharp pitchfork. I certainly didn't want anything to do with such a fearsome creature!

Religion also added to my childhood fears.

Everyone experiences fear

Fear! The dictionary describes it as a feeling of anxiety and agitation caused by the presence or nearness of a real or imagined danger, evil or pain. It is the raw emotion of dread, terror, fright and panic. When it strikes, it may feel like a raging beast or a roaring lion has gained hold of our emotions causing us to react in a far different way than we normally would. Fear, if uncontrolled, can drown out reason, facts and faith.

What is the source of this highly potent spirit of fear? Can fear be successfully resisted and controlled? Are we capable of defeating our fears?

Perhaps during your youth you had bad dreams and endured other fears as I did. Maybe you were afraid of a particular animal, of the dark or thunderstorms or had other apprehensions. The fact is, both children and adults are affected by fears in dozens of different ways. Fear is often learned during childhood such as with the imaginary trepidations I experienced. Whether genuine or fantasized, it is common to fear various entities, situations and circumstances.

The fact is, both children and adults are affected by fears in dozens of different ways.

Medical science has cataloged many types of fears and phobias. A prevalent fear is acrophobia, the fear of heights. If a person is claustrophobic, he is fearful of closed spaces. The fear of dogs is cynophobia and gatophobia is the fear of cats. Some fears may seem amusing, such as

arachibutyrophobia, which is the fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of one's mouth. Nevertheless, such fears are very real to those who endure them.

Other fears include the dread of public speaking, the fear of crowds or of being alone. The fear of rejection is common. So is the fear of failure. Some people are terrified of disease, while others are frightened by the thought of death. Many other anxieties relentlessly afflict and upset people far and wide.

Healthy fear is simply the desire for self-preservation.

Numerous books and seminars are available today that promise to help individuals overcome their fears and terrors. However, are some of our fears justified? The fact is that some fears are indeed healthy, proper and necessary. Healthy fear is simply the desire for self-preservation. Without it, people would not take appropriate caution against perils or injury.

Healthy fear vs. harmful fear

For example, healthy fear was demonstrated in the 1962 Academy Award—winning motion picture, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In one scene a violent, rabid dog was roaming a residential neighborhood causing frightened people to huddle in their homes for protection.

Atticus Finch, played by actor Gregory Peck, chose to deal with the threat. Standing alone outside, he took his rifle and shot and killed the dog, thus ending the menace. Legitimate, healthy fear was present, yet it was accompanied by a critical element—the willingness to take appropriate steps to confront it. Atticus Finch faced his fear head on. His justifiable fear was not covered up, ignored or dismissed. Unless healthy fear is tackled, it can be distorted into harmful, destructive fear.

What is harmful fear? It is the result of not taking measures to deal with a potentially fearsome situation. The outcome of not engaging our fears is upset, anxiety, nervousness and worry. Healthy fear mutates into harmful fear when we allow alarm and panic—rather than knowledge, logic and godly faith—to govern our thinking and actions.

Confronting our fears

Confronting, managing and mastering our fear is essential to living a happy, successful life. Experts in psychology offer helpful advice on dealing with fear. Stanley J. Rachman, a psychologist and professor emeritus of the Department of Psychology at the University of British Columbia, is the author of the book *Fear and Courage* (1990). He wrote, “When a situation becomes predictable, the fear diminishes.”

In other words, the more precise and rational the information we obtain, the better our fears can be managed. For example, Dr. Rachman describes how using video presentations can help prepare children for surgery. He explained, “They show an actual child being treated in an actual hospital, and that helps a great deal.” Fear can be erased or at least lessened by clear knowledge of circumstances and then logically applying the information to control the outcome.

The outcome of not engaging our fears is upset, anxiety, nervousness and worry.

Also, it is valuable to be associated with people who demonstrate courage in the face of fear. Dr. Rachman wrote, “People can pick up or model courageous or fearless behavior. Watching somebody else behave bravely in a situation that’s worrying you will definitely help.”

When facing a demanding and potentially fear-inducing event, discussing concerns with others can help alleviate distress *even* if the conditions cannot be altered. Being open about our feelings with someone who will not be judgmental or critical can be valuable. Dr. Rachman said, “Suppressing fear is not a very effective technique.”

Of course, if severe fear or worry is persistent—lasting much of each day for a few weeks—experts advise seeking professional help to determine if treatment could be beneficial. Some possible resources to find additional information, support groups and self-help programs are National Institute of Mental Health, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>, The Anxiety Disorders Association of America, <http://www.adaa.org/> and The Ross Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders Inc., <http://www.rosscenter.com/>.

“When a situation becomes predictable, the fear diminishes.”

God offers powerful help to resist our fears

Resisting fear is possible, yet in doing so, there is another vital element we ought to employ. Fear should be confronted with the help of God. Our Creator does not want us to endure harmful, destructive fear. As a result, He offers power, support and encouragement in combating our fears.



“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). The “spirit of fear” does not originate from God but arises in the human mind, influenced by Satan the devil. The word “sound” is related to the term sober-minded (Titus 1:8), meaning that with God’s aid we can perform rationally and calmly in a potentially scary situation. We are instructed to “be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Uncontrolled fear causes confusion and turmoil (Matthew 8:24-26). If we do not resist Satan’s manipulative influence and strive to deal with our fears in genuine godly faith, our spiritual destruction can occur (1 Timothy 1:19). We can be fully confident, however, that we can win our battles against fear because God’s ways are ideal. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

Jesus Christ understands our fears

Some people feel lost and alone in their fears or may be embarrassed when they display anxiety at times. The fact is, all people experience fear. Even the great personalities of the Bible expressed and endured fearfulness. The apostle Paul articulated some of his personal fears to the brethren at Corinth. “It was trouble at every turn, wrangling all round me, fears in my own mind” (2 Corinthians 7:5, Moffat version).

Even Jesus Christ, when He walked on earth, discovered what human fear was like and therefore acutely understands our fears and worries. So, when we are anxious and fearful, we can instantly call on His powerful help. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Unlike sometimes fickle human beings, God will never let us down. He can give us the spiritual, mental and emotional strength we need to face our fears. “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6, New International Version).

*What will happen
as a result of our
diligent prayers?*

Furthermore, the apostle Paul admonishes us to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). What will happen as a result of our diligent prayers? “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

The fear God wants us to have

God desires that we be utterly free of all harmful, destructive fears. Even so, there is a type of fear He actually wants us to have. Proverbs 1:7 explains that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” The word translated “fear” in this verse does not mean terror. The Hebrew root word means “a profound respect and awe.” God does not want us to be terrified of Him; instead, He wants us to honor Him as our faithful Sustainer. Our Creator desires our worship and obedience to keep His commandments so we can be blessed with genuine peace of mind and happiness (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Although everyone experiences fear, combating it takes knowledge, reason and genuine, godly faith. With God’s steadfast guidance, strength and encouragement, we can resist and defeat the roaring lion of fear.

Further reading

You can learn more about the source of much fear and how to combat it in our booklet [*Is There Really a Devil?*](#) And you can prove that God—the source of our help in combating fear—really does exist by reading [*Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*](#)

Becoming Resensitized

By Jeremy Lallier

If we have prolonged or repeated exposure to something, we get used to it. So what happens when that something is wrong—something we don't want to be comfortable with? It takes a lot of commitment—and God's help—but we can restore our sensitivity to sin.



RECENTLY I'VE BEEN ON A WEBCOMIC KICK. (For those who don't know, a *webcomic* is a short, regularly published comic strip you can read over the Internet.) After I finished United Church of God's nine-month Ambassador Bible Center program, I found myself with a lot more spare time than I had the drive to do anything with—and webcomics turned out to be an addictive time waster. It also turns out there are a *lot* of them floating around, so it's pretty much impossible to run out of material.

The problem with this is from time to time webcomics—some more than others—will feature some pretty foul language. When I first came into contact with it, my response was to simply ignore it, and that worked for a while. But somewhere along the line, without entirely realizing it, I got used to it. From there a properly executed swear word could actually be a little funny. Soon, as a result of all this, I found that kind of language working its way into my own thoughts.

*Desensitization...
the process by
which we get used
to something,
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normal.*

It's embarrassing, really. I don't swear and fully intend to keep it that way. But the words are in my head and it seems as if they've taken up residence there—and that's something I never should have let happen. Now it's a battle to try to kick them out.

I'm not writing this as some sort of confessional; I just want to give you some example of what I want to talk about: desensitization. It's the process by which, through continued exposure to one thing or another, we get used to something, accepting it as normal.

The process starts when we're in the womb. The online science news service EurekaAlert! recently reported on a process called fetal habituation—where a fetus, repeatedly exposed to the same stimulus, will eventually recognize it as "safe" and therefore stop responding to it.

We habituate too. It's just the way we work as human beings. In almost every case, constant exposure to any one thing gradually reduces whatever impact it formerly had on us.



Unfortunately, we can get used to bad things just as easily as we can get used to anything else. Prolonged exposure to violence in the media makes us less and less affected by it to the point where it doesn't really faze us at all. Sexual promiscuity, at a level that would have been shocking to many just decades ago, has become a normal routine for our society. And as for me, I have swear words stuck in my head that I'm having an awful hard time getting rid of, because I accepted them as normal and okay.

But what happens once we become desensitized to a sin? Is it possible to become *resensitized*? It's difficult, but I submit that not only is it possible, it is absolutely *necessary* that we do. Let's look at what God says on the issue. Ideally, you don't want to deal with becoming desensitized at all, because it's a very difficult road back. Many have been there—maybe even are there now—and know how true this is. That's why Paul wrote that we should “flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:11-12). If we hang around the evil of the world too long, we will begin to accept it as—at the very least—normal.

God hates sin. It's what separates us from Him and why His Son had to die for us. So, when our attitude towards the things causing this is anything less than *hating* “every false way” (Psalm 119:104), we have some serious reevaluation to do.

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But how do we get from being desensitized to resensitized? Here are a few steps that will help you on your journey.

1. Ask God for the strength to change

It has to start here. Our own will and drive isn't going to be enough to bring about any sort of permanent change; it must be coupled with strength and will from God. All things are possible with Him (Philippians 4:13); few things are possible without.

2. Separate yourself from whatever you've become desensitized to

If constant exposure to something has caused you to see it as normal and acceptable, remove yourself from it whenever possible. The less you are around it, the less normal it will seem to you. This is why God's people living in the end-time Babylon system are told to “come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4). Being in a sinful environment is the perfect breeding ground for developing tolerance to sin...so we must remove ourselves when we can.



3. Force yourself back into being disgusted by what's evil

Here's the tricky part. It's easy when your gut instinct is to hate a sin, but when you're used to it, you have to mentally tell yourself, "Okay, this is bad. This keeps people separated from God and from having a relationship with Him. This is why Christ was nailed to a tree." The more we begin to think through the implications of that (Romans 12:2), the more we can regain the knee-jerk emotional response of hating sin that we had lost.

4. DON'T GO BACK!

This seems as if it should be simple. Avoid returning to whatever led you down the path to getting desensitized in the first place. But we make mistakes all the time, and it's easy to justify certain actions, even when we know where they lead.

But don't. That's all there is to it. Do not choose to do it—because it is *always* a choice. If you do make that mistake, then repeat steps 1-4 until you've got it right. Just don't forget Solomon's words in Proverbs 26:11—"As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly." Doing the same stupid thing that got you in trouble the first time is like eating your own vomit. Graphic? Certainly, yes. But it makes the point.

If we are to be the lights God called us out of the world to be, we cannot allow ourselves to become accustomed to the evil around us. When we slip back into accepting old familiar sins, we *must* become resensitized. It is not an option.

Five Tools for Dealing With Trials

By Nick Lamoureux

What can you do when you have tried everything to solve a problem? Here are five tools to help turn trials into godly character.



HAVE YOU EVER REACHED A POINT where life seems to be getting the better of you? Well if you've ever felt like this, you're not alone. The biblical character Job also knew what it feels like to be discouraged, with nowhere to turn. "Oh that I might have my request, that God would grant me the thing that I long for! That it would please God to crush me, that He would loose His hand and cut me off!" (Job 6:8).

As human beings, we tend to blow small things out of proportion. Is God not the Creator and Sustainer of all life, and is He not in control and well aware of all things happening on earth? Of course He is! What's more, God has promised to provide for us if we have put our trust in Him. Don't make the mistake of limiting God.

The purpose of trials

Why must we go through trials if God knows we love Him and want to be in His Kingdom? God allows us to encounter trials for a reason. It's not so He can see how far we're able to be pushed before we break, but rather so we can grow in godly character.



God wants us to constantly seek Him and grow in His way of life, not stay where we are. We aren't perfect, so obviously we need to change. Even if we were perfect, we would *still* go through trials. A good example of this is Jesus Christ, the only perfect man to ever live. He had more trials and temptations than we can ever imagine.

Think of the scenario in Luke 4. "Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing,

and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. And the devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."' "

"Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve"' (Luke 4:1-8).

God let His Son go through intense trials to set an example for us of what we are supposed to do when we encounter hard times and trials that really test our faith.

Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, is the ultimate master of self-control. God let His Son go through intense trials, like being tempted by Satan in the wilderness for 40 days and nights, to set an example for us of what we are supposed to do when we encounter hard times and trials that really test our faith.

There are five basic tools that God has given us to cope with difficulty situations: prayer, Bible study, fasting, meditation and fellowship. All these tools can be used in a constructive manner toward success. The following are just some of the ways that these tools can be applied in your life.

Tool #1: prayer

God sees all and knows what's going on in our life. We don't pray to Him to let Him know what's going on in our lives, but to build a relationship with Him. Take your own human father, for example. When you were a kid, you probably didn't need to tell him that you had played a baseball game that day, but you talked about it anyway and as a result developed a stronger relationship with Him.

It's also important to remember that God *wants* us to ask Him for the things we need in life. In Matthew 7:7-8 Jesus encourages, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Tool #2: Bible study

Perhaps the reason we're going through a certain trial is because there's something God wants us to learn or something we need to change in our lives. Looking at God's Word and making sure that we're trying our best to put it into practice in our daily lives is important; we shouldn't have contact with God and seek Him out only when things are going bad or we need something done.



Tool #3: fasting

Some trials can't be solved by prayer alone, but require a greater sacrifice on our part. Consider the time when Christ's disciples were unable to cast out a demon.

"And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, 'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.' Then Jesus answered and said, 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.'

When you were a kid, you probably didn't need to tell your father that you had played a baseball game that day, but you talked about it anyway...

"And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?' So Jesus said to them, 'Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting'" (Matthew 17:14-21).

The attitude necessary for effective fasting is explained by God in Isaiah 58:3-12. If our focus is on others instead of ourselves, "then you shall call, and the LORD will answer" (verse 9).

Tool #4: meditation

Often during a trial we become so stressed and worried about the situation that we forget to just stop, take a deep breath and a good look at the situation. When we meditate on God's Word and apply it to our situation, many times we can find the answer is right in front of our nose.

When we meditate on God's Word, many times we can find the answer is right in front of our nose.

Tool #5: fellowship

Iron sharpens iron, so why not talk with your close fellow brethren about an issue they may have insight on? Hebrews 10:24-25 emphasizes the necessity of spending time with the rest of God's people. Perhaps they have advice for you; or perhaps they can pray, maybe even fast, for you. Simply being around other members can take a load off your shoulders.

So you see, trials are beneficial, whether we feel it when going through one or not. Trials will help us grow in godly character if we learn to use the tools our Father has provided us to have successful lives. We go through trials because God loves us. He *wants* us to come to Him and put our trust and problems in His hands.

Helping Your Angry Child Learn Control

By Linda LaBissoniere, M.Ed.

Every child gets angry occasionally, but when anger, aggressive acts and negative comments become the norm, it is important for parents to take action to help their children. You can help your child learn to cope with his feelings and express anger in appropriate ways.



NICOLE SHOOK HER HEAD IN DISMAY. She was at a loss on how to control her 8-year-old son Justin. He seemed to get angry very often and this worried her. That day he had gotten into a fight at school, yelled at his little sister and even kicked the dog. She sent him to his room and minutes later discovered that he had torn his sheets off the bed and knocked his lamp to the floor. “How will I handle him when he is a teenager—and bigger than me,” she wondered as she looked at Justin’s scowling face.

Have you ever felt as Nicole did on that very bad day? Are you at a loss as to how to help your child with his or her anger? What insights can God’s Word give us in raising our children? Are you practicing loving authority in your child rearing and how can that help your angry child? Below are some questions to ask yourself and tips to guide you in helping him or her.

It won’t just happen

The first step is finding out why your child becomes angry. In some cases children who appear angry are actually sad or depressed. Anger may also be a response to feelings of low self-esteem or anxiety. Has there been a significant change in your child’s life or are there stressful situations that could be affecting him or her? If your child exhibits extreme unresolved anger or shows signs of anxiety or depression, it would be wise to talk to a mental health professional.

Angry toddlers eventually become angry, hard-to-control teens. The best time to teach anger control is while your child is young and easily moldable.

In most cases, however, angry children have just never been taught how to control this powerful emotion. One of the greatest gifts that parents can give to their children is self-control. You can teach your child self-control by giving guidelines as to the behaviors that are expected and then, with loving authority, correcting them for disobedience.

This may seem harsh and not in line with what some psychologists will tell you. However, God instructs us to discipline our children. Notice Proverbs 29:17, "Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul." Also Proverbs 19:18 states, "Chasten your son while there is hope."

If you allow your child to have temper tantrums at a young age, you may be setting the stage for lifelong problems with anger management. Many feel that their children will outgrow their angry outbursts, so they fail to teach anger management skills. Unfortunately, this seldom occurs, and angry toddlers eventually become angry, hard-to-control teens. The best time to teach anger control is while your child is young and easily moldable.

Skillful parents learn the balance between teaching their children self-control and helping them to develop self-esteem. Authoritarian parents often focus on strict obedience to rules, and their children can end up feeling unloved. This can lead to feelings of anger and even rebellion as their child gets older. Parents who are strict in an unloving way can actually provoke their children to anger or discouragement. The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:4, "And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Colossians 3:21 states, "Fathers, do not provoke your children [to anger], lest they become discouraged."



Permissive parents are often more focused on their child's self-esteem and therefore discipline less. In many cases these children develop very little self-control, which will undoubtedly cause problems throughout their lives.

Parents who are balanced give their children unconditional love, but they also set high standards of obedience and self-control by utilizing loving authority. Not only do these parents set and enforce rules, but they also listen to their children's feelings and encourage them.

If you "blow up" in anger periodically, your child will likely learn to respond the same way.

Now that we have discussed some basics of effective parenting, we can focus on specific points to help you with your child's anger problems. First, realize that anger is a God-given human emotion and that it is unhealthy to suppress feelings of anger. Your focus should be on teaching your child how to manage his or her angry feelings in appropriate ways. It is also important that you teach and encourage attitudes of love, sharing and forgiveness in your child. This will help him or her to develop the mind of God and, consequently, become angry less often. With this in mind, here are some tips.

Listen and help your child to understand his or her feelings

Allow your child to feel angry and listen to how he or she feels. For very young children, you may even need to help them express their feelings and understand why they feel as they do. For example, if your toddler knocks down a block tower, you can help him understand and learn to

cope with the frustration by stating, "I know you're angry because you knocked down your tower. I can help you build another one, or we can put the blocks away and find something else to play with that will help you feel better."

In this short conversation you have helped your child to understand his or her feelings, and you have also taught a coping skill of doing something different when you are angry or frustrated. Many adults have learned to do this very thing. For example, if they become frustrated when the lawn mower won't start, they will do something else for a while.

Teach your child how to respond when angered

The best way to teach is to model the correct way to respond to angry feelings. If you "blow up" in anger periodically, your child will likely learn to respond the same way. You should also use actual situations as teachable moments. For example, if your son smashed his sister's dollhouse when she took his toy car, explain that it is okay to feel angry, but damaging his sister's property is not okay. You should then tell him what he should do in that situation. Offer other ways for him to express his anger.

You might say something like, "Here's what I do when I get angry. I take a deep breath and slowly count to five. This gives me time to calm down so that I don't do something that I will feel sorry for later." You may also say, "Instead of damaging your sister's property when you're mad, tell me about what happened, or warn her that you will tell on her if she doesn't return your car."

If your child is small, it can be effective to use puppets or dolls to model the correct way to respond when angered.

If your child is small, it can be effective to use puppets or dolls to model the correct way to respond when angered. You also can use humor to make the example funny to your child. For older children, reading or telling a story can be quite effective. The story should model the correct way to handle frustration and anger.

It is also important to teach your child how to relieve feelings of tension and anger. That can include engaging in an activity such as a sport or exercise, preferably outdoors. It may be helpful to provide physical outlets for your child, such as regularly going to the gym to shoot basketball hoops or running in the park.

Older children can be encouraged to write in a journal to express their feelings. If they are angry because of what someone has done to them, teach them about writing a letter to the person, with the intention of mailing or not mailing the letter. Letter writing is a very effective tool to help children process their feelings. By putting their true feelings down on paper they are able deal with their emotions effectively. Younger children can create a picture journal to express their feelings.

Set and enforce rules and guidelines with loving authority



Ideally, setting rules and guidelines for appropriate behavior should be done at a time when your child is not angry. You should not only set clear rules, but also state the consequences for disobedience. For example, you may tell your children that they must not hit a brother or sister when angry. Tell them that if they do so, they will have to accept the consequences, which would be some form of punishment. Be as specific as possible so that your children will clearly understand the consequences of their actions. If you want success, it is very important that you

consistently enforce the stated punishment.

Praise your child and reward with love and affection

Make it a point to find situations when your child has successfully handled anger or a frustrating situation and praise him or her. For example, you might say, "I liked the way that you did not get mad when your sister took your toy car."

Also look for others areas to praise your child, and make sure you are giving him or her a lot of affection. Unfortunately, some children act aggressively just to get a parent to give them attention. Could this be true for your child? If you want your child to be successful, it is important to give him or her adequate praise and attention. At times you may even want to reward your child for behaving appropriately by giving a special gift or activity to enjoy.

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When possible, control your child's environment

This would include the children that he plays with, as well as the media he is exposed to. If a neighborhood child is aggressive and angry, it would be wise not to allow your child unsupervised playtime opportunities.

Also carefully monitor and limit television viewing, since it is often filled with angry and violent characters. Recent studies have shown that children can become more aggressive when they watch too much television. The American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that children under the age of 2 should not watch television at all and that older children should watch only one to two hours of educational, nonviolent television programming a day.

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It may also be helpful to restrict your child from watching the news. Young children have a hard time processing images of war, terrorist acts and other acts of violence; and this may cause them to act out with angry behavior. In addition, parents should carefully monitor video and computer games for aggressive content.

Being the parent of an angry child can be very stressful. You may be very disappointed that your child is prone to angry outbursts and even want to give up. Persevere for

your child's sake, for it takes time and patience to help your child develop self-control. Pray for God's guidance in order to deal with your child in love and wisdom. Ask God to help you see your child through His eyes.

Teach your child how to respond when he or she is angry by establishing clear rules. Lovingly discipline your child when he or she forgets or falls back into old habits. Lavish affection and attention on your child, and finally, strive to control his environment as much as possible. By employing these tips, you will help your child develop self-control and avoid a lifetime of anger-related problems.

Can a Woman Forget?

By Elissa Kroeger

The psychological community does not recognize post-abortion syndrome (PAS). But it is real and does seriously affect many women—and men. What is it? Can someone heal from this traumatic experience? How? How can others help?



CLAIRE is a vivacious mother of three. She and her husband enjoy serving in their local church in between chasing toddlers around. Claire is one of those people who always seems to be in a good mood. Nobody would ever guess that shortly after the birth of her third child, Claire became depressed. It got so bad that she had trouble getting out of bed in the morning. Sometimes she would go back to bed when her husband left for work.

There came a day when she experienced an intense desire to smother her baby with a pillow. She did not do it; she prayed for help. She never told anyone. What would people think if they knew? Someone would call Child Protective Services and have her children taken away. Was she a terrible mother?

There is another thing Claire never told anyone. Years before, Claire had an abortion. She had not thought about it in years. It was buried in the waters of baptism with her other sins, wasn't it?

JIM is in his 50s. He is a quiet single man who shows up every time someone needs help moving furniture or doing heavy yard work. A long time ago his girlfriend had an abortion. He remembers the date every year. He does not talk about it. Sometimes he looks at the young people at church, especially the young men who would be about the age of his child. It makes him sad to think of what might have been.

SARA grew up going to church, but later got sidetracked by all that the world has to offer. She got married and had a child but soon divorced. Now, a few boyfriends and a few abortions later, Sara knows the truth about God and His Word, but she has become bitter and sarcastic. She wonders whether she has committed the unpardonable sin. Has she gone too far to repent? Sometimes she wonders if she even cares.

Guilt or conditioned response?

Since abortion was legalized in the United States in 1973, millions of people have thought of it as a quick solution to a sticky “problem.” A woman who had an abortion in her 20s then would be in her 50s or 60s today. Although it was legal, abortion was not socially acceptable in most circles. Many women who had abortions in the early years never told more than a tiny handful of people. It was largely a secret sin.

It is hard to find statistics on what is now being called post-abortion syndrome (PAS). The psychological community does not officially recognize it. Instead many psychologists interpret it as a tactic that religious pro-life people use to inflict guilt on others who have had abortions (something a true Christian would never do).

There are numerous Web sites dedicated to the idea that there is nothing wrong with having an abortion. According to these sites, guilt after an abortion is a conditioned response generated by a repressive society. A woman who feels too much guilt was probably emotionally abused in some way and fed old-fashioned ideas about her role in society. Their idea of counseling is to work through the guilt without any idea of repentance.



Approaching abortion in this way does not make the problem go away for someone who is suffering. The truth is that God has created women with the wonderful capacity to give birth to children and love those children in a special way. When this process is interrupted because of sin, it creates an identity crisis. How can one who was created with the capacity to have children agree to have a child killed, however small it was at the time? It is more than guilt over something done. It is an attack on a woman’s very nature. A popular saying goes: “Abortion: One dead, one wounded.”

Thankfully, many individual psychologists have done work in this area. PAS follows a pattern similar to other forms of post-traumatic stress disorder. After the abortion many women go right back into normal life. There are no emotions at all right then. Sometimes a woman may not even remember the details of the actual operation. This numbness can extend to other areas of life, including relationships with family, friends and other children. It is not easy to notice the numbness.

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Signs of post-abortion syndrome

The signs of PAS are many. On the surface they may not seem abortion-related, especially to someone on the outside who does not know. Signs can range from general feelings of anxiety to suicidal depression to all sorts of self-punishing behavior. In rare cases an actual psychosis results that requires serious attention or hospitalization. Some women keep getting pregnant to replace the aborted baby just to abort another one and become further entangled in the mess. Others turn to drugs and alcohol or other addictive behaviors.

Often years go by before the emotions hit. They can be triggered by the birth of a child, the birth of someone else's child, the inability to have a child, maybe even watching a good movie. A woman can become preoccupied with the age her child would be on any given day or with what her friends or colleagues would think of her if they knew.



Sometimes a woman who has had a secret abortion is taken aback when she is expecting another child. On the medical history forms are questions about previous pregnancies and their outcomes. She may lie about it and then experience anxiety about whether this will affect the health of her new baby. This kind of anxiety can even affect a woman's later childbirth experiences. It can be a painful thing to bring up issues from the past. It can be more painful and damaging to hide them. It becomes a vicious circle that is hard to escape.

Counselors are aware that men can suffer the effects of an abortion as deeply as women. Some men have had their children aborted against their will or without their knowledge at the time. Worse, others may have consented to or urged the abortion and then repented after the damage was done. A man in this situation can feel angry and helpless. Counseling can direct him to positive actions to take to make himself a part of the solution.

Hope for recovery

Once a person (most often a woman) enters post-abortion counseling, there are as many paths the counseling can take as there are situations that brought her to the counseling. Many women benefit from giving their aborted child an identity. This includes naming the child and allowing herself to go through a normal mourning process. It can include writing the child a letter, buying him a stuffed animal or some other action that affirms the child's identity. A

Men can suffer the effects of an abortion as deeply as women.

woman who has had an abortion sometimes feels guilty about allowing herself to mourn, especially when she knows women who have had miscarriages or lost their children to other causes. It is, however, an important part of the healing process.

It is essential to look at abortion the way God looks at it. Sin can be forgiven, but it must be repented of—turned away from. The apostle Paul knew that many Christians had pasts that included terrible sins (1 Corinthians 6:11). He exhorted them to live in ways worthy of their calling as Christians. Things have not changed so much in 2,000 years.

Part of this turning away process can include doing some kind of service for others in a similar situation. This can be as simple as helping a young single mother with her children during a church service. It can mean becoming a counselor or crocheting blankets or sorting donated baby clothes for a crisis pregnancy center.

Michelle began having nightmares of her aborted child trying to find her. These began shortly after the birth of her second child. She went through counseling to work through her guilt and other emotions. Now she is a counselor. Her compassion is unsurpassed. She has been there and knows what it takes to heal.

The Smith family decided to adopt babies from crisis situations and raise them in a happy family environment.

However this service manifests itself, it is a changing of the focus from one's self and past sins to showing outgoing concern for others. This is probably the best strategy for healing from any past hurt, including abortion.

Helping others

In the very possible event that someone you know decides to confide in you that she suffers from some aspect of PAS, be calm. The best thing is to listen. Someone who chooses you to be the first person she tells has probably agonized about it for a long time before saying anything. Let her know you care and that your feelings of friendship have not been diminished. Direct her to a pastor or counselor and offer to drive her to any counseling sessions since they can be very emotionally draining.

If you know someone like Sara, mentioned in the introduction, pray for her. Only God can break through her walls of indifference. It is usually not constructive to beat someone over the head with what she probably already knows. It is important to actively be her friend. You can do this without condoning her actions. Showing love for someone is never a waste of time. We live in a world characterized by sin of every imaginable variety. Abortion and its affects are all around us. Part of our job of being salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-14) includes showing concern for those who struggle with guilt over past sins. Isaiah 49:15 says, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you." God

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promises that upon repentance He will not forget those who love Him. Once someone repents, she is to go and sin no more; entering into a life of outgoing concern for others.

Note: All stories mentioned are based on the lives of real people. The names and circumstances have been altered to protect their identities.

A Few Resources Related to Abortion and PAS

- *A Solitary Sorrow: Finding Healing and Wholeness After Abortion* by Teri Reisser and Dr. Paul Reisser (Shaw Books, 2000): medical information and details about PAS.
- *The Atonement Child* by Francine Rivers (Tyndale House Publishers, 1999): a fictional story that includes many aspects of the abortion situation including PAS.
- *Her Choice to Heal: Finding Spiritual and Emotional Peace After Abortion* by Sydna Masse (David C. Cook, 2009): a personal story of healing.
- Care Net, national crisis pregnancy centers and their services: www.care-net.org; 1-800-395-HELP.
- Ramah International, an organization dedicated to helping post-abortive women find healing. The name comes from Matthew 2:18, "A voice was heard in Ramah... Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more": www.ramahinternational.org.

Letters to the Editor

[Spank the Book—Heal the Heart](#)



I appreciated the article "[Spank the Book—Heal the Heart](#)".

I determined that with God's help I would not pass on the childhood abuse (mostly verbal) that I received as a child to my own children. I knew what it felt like and I did not want them to suffer that. The kids saw the obvious contrast with the way I was to them with the way their grandmother was with them and her own grown kids and it made quite an impression on them. With God's help, I was successful and feel gratified that both children have happy families.

— Marilyn Braley, Houston



Great article, John Fox.

— D. Thompson

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity