**Life Lesson**

**Harnessing the Power of Mercy**

 **to Work for Peace and Fairness**

Mercy has an army of powerful cousins: war, blame, hurt, pain, anger, and criticism. They are all ***neutral*** resources. We can choose whether we use them to fight for a more sickening world, or for a healthier one. And either way we choose, we put out what we take in. We become what we eat – garbage in, garbage out, and healthy in, healthy out. We also reap what we sow. Whatever we put out is going to grow and come back into us. So let’s see how to make healthy choices with these issues, in both what we allow to impress us, and how we express ourselves.

**In my parent-child relationships, past and present, and in all of life,**

Do I remind to my loved ones of their limits, failures, and mistakes?

 Or do I more often remind them of their best moments from the past, and their good potential for the future?

Do I see parents as having the power, authority, and responsibility for controlling children, teaching them by forceful consequences?

 Or do I see parents more with the job of protecting and loving children, teaching more by modeling and realistic consequences?

**With my siblings, peers, and friends, and in all of life,**

Do I look for the faults of others, seeking ways to control them?

 Or do I look primarily for my own faults, seeking ways I can grow in self-control?

Do I take things personally, believing my pain is what someone did to me?

 Or do I avoid taking offense, by trying to accept that people are who they are?

**With my beloved, mate, my most significant other, and in all of life,**

Do I mostly absorb anger and injustice in public, so that I naturally discharge it in private at home with my partner?

 Or do I mostly discharge my anger in public, and direct it against others who would threaten my loving partnership at home?

Do I save my anger up for when I see the other person hurting me, to discharge it so I can get even?

 Or do I express anger carefully and constructively, when I see the other person hurting themselves or others?

**In my online interactions with the public, and in all of life,**

**With the social media, news feeds, music, movies, TV, and video games I prefer,**

 Do I take in information and experiences that inspire hate, violence, and slander?

 Or do I take in things that inspire mercy, grace, forgiveness, civility, and patience?

Do I fight for divisiveness and revenge, to get more power for my people?

 Or do I fight for peace and justice for all people?

**When I express myself in public through phone, text, or social media,**

 Do I mostly point out the faults and mistakes of others?

 Or do I draw the attention of others to healthy people, groups, choices, and experiences?

Do I mostly point out what makes us all fear and hate each other (our differences)?

 Or do I mostly point out what makes us all human (our similarities)?

**In all my relationships,**

**When I feel enmeshed with someone, or estranged from them,**

 Do I use anger to push us together or apart?

 Or do I use it to fight for a healthier, reconciled relationship, with healthier boundaries?

**When I have power struggles and disagreements,**

 Do I seek to get my way (fighting for this against that, so I will either win or lose),

 Or do I seek a better way for all concerned (for both this way *and* that, so we can *both* win something)?

**When I feel hurt or offended by someone,**

 Do I react quickly, to relieve and decompress myself, to comfort myself?

 Or do I react slowly, so I can figure out how relieve, comfort, and decompress *the relationship*?

**When I see someone else being mean and hateful,**

 Do I lash out at their behavior, and criticize their motive or character?

Or do I show anger at merely their behavior, and show love for who they really are in most other situations?

**USING MERCY and ANGER TO CREATE PEACE: Resentment vs. Peacemaking**

Anger is the normal human response to injustice. When faced with hurt, it guides and motivates our efforts to correct an unfair situation. Its power is given to correct injustice. When justice is seen through the eyes of divine love and mercy, the anger is God's, and it is a powerful force influencing others. When the focus of our hurt is personal (*our* needs have been neglected, *our* pride has been hurt), we are walking in the flesh, so the most adaptive response is a turning to God for comfort and guidance. Sadness and tears are often the outward expression. When our expressions of grief (“I’m so sorry you feel that way”) meet with a cold heart and closed mind in others, then anger, having first broken open and cleansed our own souls, can do the same for others. Here is how the morally neutral powers of mercy and anger can be harnessed to do good for the Kingdom of God.

**UNMERCIFUL INWARD RESPONSES TO ANGER (Resentment)**

 Deny it, or bury it alive. **Eph 4:26**

Run to God about something else, as an escape, like just going on to church or Bible study and acting like nothing is wrong. **Mt 5:23-24; Mk 11:25-26**

 Plan ways to get even. **Rom 12:17,18**

**MERCIFUL INWARD RESPONSES TO ANGER (Peacemaking)**

 Turn to God for help**, Psalms 39 and 56**, and

 for inner cleansing. **Psalm 51; Mt 7:1-5**.

Forgive others. **Matt 6:12-15; Mt 18:21-35; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13**

Pray for enemies, appealing to God's wrath: **Psalms 35 and 109, Matt 23**

 justice**: Psalms 28 and 37**, and *then*

 mercy: **Luke 6:27-8, 23:33-34**

Decide if it is your anger (problem) or God's. **Romans 12:17-21**

**UNMERCIFUL OUTWARD RESPONSES TO ANGER (Resentment)**

Speaking quickly without reflection. **Prov 14: 17, 29; 29:11**

Cursing **Rom 12:14, James 1: 19-21**

Gossip **Lev 19:16, Rom 1: 28-9**

Hostile, insulting criticism to the offender's face. **Mt 5: 21-2**

 behind offender's back. **II Cor 12:20**

Getting even - paying back the hurt. **Mt 5: 38-9, Rom 12:19**

**MERCIFUL OUTWARD RESPONSES TO ANGER (Peacemaking)**

Be kind to enemies. **I Sam 24: 1-22; Prov. 25:21-22; Mt 5: 38-47**; **Rom 12: 19-20**

Take action to correct situation. **John 2: 13-17**

Verbally confront the offender. **II Tim 2: 24-25; Mt 23**

Try to make peace, first one-to-one, then with one or two others to help resolve differences, then to church authority. **Mt 18: 15-20** The healing of the relationship comes from the new and deeper

 understanding of each other, which comes from really listening to each other, which comes from

the power of Jesus' presence: **v. 20**

**ISSUES OF MERCY AND FAIRNESS**

**IN RAISING HEALTHY CHILDREN**

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 I find most children at times blow a gasket when they believe their parents are being unfair to them -- as if the child and parent could agree on what’s impartial! Why do the words “That’s not fair!” make us all so furious? *Anger is the normal, adaptive response to something that doesn’t seem fair.*

 So what would be a practical, understandable definition of what’s fair? Let’s define *fair as what does the most good and the least harm to everyone in the long run.*  In this view, anger isn’t good or bad. It’s not sick or healthy. It all depends on whether it’s used to fight for something that benefits more people. And we all need mercy, so when punishing mistakes, we need to communicate the terms and reasons for this punishment in merciful ways.

 Healthy anger fights for everybody to have a decent shot at the good life, the honest and kind life that everybody needs, that money can’t buy. A healthy expression of anger draws all of our attention to an injustice, and motivates us all to look for solutions that benefit everyone.

 Before our children are teenagers, we need to be careful not to reward their selfish, demanding expressions of anger by giving into them. The tantrums of 6-year-olds may seem harmless or entertaining. But when 16-year-olds think they *know* what’s best and can’t make it happen, they explode, and a 16-year-old’s tantrum can really hurt a lot of people. So let’s don’t indulge children’s tantrums, screaming, threats, or harsh criticisms by trying to appease them. That just uses up a lot of tomorrow’s peace to buy a little bit for today.

 And best not go the other way, by cutting down your child. Better to ask children what’s wrong in a given situation, what they want, what they think would be more fair to themselves *and* others, what solutions to conflict would be more beneficial for everybody, both now and later on.

 Best to be slow to feed your children answers to these difficult questions. Continuing to ask questions draws out better and better answers, and teaches them to use their heads and hearts to solve problems. They need you to do *nothing* for them until they come up with something, something better for everyone. And you’ll need to keep on doing this when they are older.

 Here are some other facts for you to believe, teach, and model for **teenagers**:

* Anger can work for or against a relationship: it can build either a bond or a barrier between us.
* If you don’t *talk your anger out* with others, you will *take it out* on others, or on yourself.
* Anger held inside too long becomes self-hatred, bitterness, and depression, which isn’t fair to you.
* Abused children tend to abuse their own children later, unless they get healing. Otherwise, “hurt people hurt people.”
* With social media, if you take in anger and injustice, then you will send out that same anger and unfairness. In a continuous spiral up or down, online, we become what we eat.
* The selfish anger and unfairness you put out against others will come back to haunt you. We reap what we sow. *[That goes for us parents too: if we use anger to control our children, especially to make our lives better at their expense, they will use their anger to control and take advantage of us.]*

***Healthy Expressions of Mercy and Anger***

* Use news and social media filters to build bridges with healthy people, not to wall them out.
* Choose role models that neither harm themselves nor other people.
* Privately decompress myself and soothe my anger so I won’t vomit it later out onto others.
* To avoid the “stuff and blow” cycle, use pressure valves to talk out my feelings about what’s fair.
* Don’t use anger to make war (I win or lose), but to fight for peace (see how we can all win).
* Instead of *getting even* with one who hurt me, I’ll *get better* -- a life well lived is the best revenge.
* Be angry at unfair choices, but not at the people who make them: love the sinner and hate the sin.
* “I hate to see you *[do that]* to *[yourself/this family/our relationship].* Why don’t you *[do this]* instead?”

 Responses like these require mercy, forgiveness. We can’t usually give that until we receive it, from somewhere. We can’t receive it until we ask for it, and then receive it by forgiving ourselves. After that, the more we give mercy, the more we can receive it, and the more of it we can keep giving. Maybe time to prime that forgiveness pump? Rather than asking people we have hurt to give it to us, wouldn’t it work better to ask for mercy from those who seem to have plenty to give? Forgiven people are forgivin’ people.

 In life, and in every healthy family, there must be a place for anger and blame, and also for expressions of mercy and making peace. We all struggle to learn and live by what’s fair, but we’re better together, working for resolutions that help us all find a better life.