

Growing as a Father

FATHER'S ANGER CRUSHES CHILDREN

Charlie** sat in front of me crying. He was a 25-year-old whose wife had just left him. He had lost his temper and beat her. Now he was just beginning to feel his loneliness and guilt. He was angry, bitter and afraid.

Charlie proceeded to tell me that when he was a young child his father had a bad temper. It was not a violent anger but an anger that caused the father to withdraw from his family. He was often gone on business. He did not seem to care about his son. Because his father never took time with him, held him or enjoyed him, Charlie came to feel

* Not his real name.

rejected, worthless and incompetent. The only time he felt strong and masculine was when he was angry. He came to see me because he loved his wife and wanted to be reconciled with her.

I also felt sadness and anger for Charlie and his childhood losses. As he wept, I could see the anger toward his father etched on his face.

When a father expresses anger, it directly affects the child's innermost being. Anger is a direct violation of the child's dignity. Anger does the opposite of what a father's loving relationship does. The longings and legitimate desires for approval, acceptance and understanding are cut off. The child gets the feeling of being disconnected. Self-hatred, fear, mistrust and bitterness begin to grow. Lack of a loving father-child relationship, the father's irritability and anger and an absent or abandoning father negatively affect a child's self-image. Any of these predispose a child

to deep-seated anger and hostility directed at his father, self, the world, future or God.

Finally the time came when I was able to ask Charlie if he was ready and willing to forgive his father. After a struggle, Charlie prayed and forgave his father. At the same moment he felt as if the arms of God were embracing him. A sense of belonging, worth and confidence overwhelmed him. Charlie had dealt with the root of his anger problem.

Charlie became part of a men's group that met weekly. They understood Charlie and his anger problem. Prayer, caring and Bible studies helped Charlie grow as a man of God. In this group he learned to dialogue and interact without anger. The other men drew Charlie to manhood, restoring the masculinity that had been crushed by his angry father.

Now he began the long road to rebuild his wife's confidence. Charlie had to

demonstrate to her that he had dealt with the causes of his anger. She would have to see that Charlie was now a man among men, that God's Spirit was going to be demonstrated in his daily life.

Charlie sent her cards and letters. After several months he asked to have dinner with her. Slowly but surely over the next eight months, Charlie was able to rebuild a meaningful relationship. His wife learned to trust him. Intimacy grew between them.

Today Charlie and his wife have three lovely children. Charlie is able to handle conflicts without losing control. If he gets angry, he repents, apologizes and asks forgiveness. Charlie has broken the generational pattern of anger and abuse in his family line.

As a restored man, Charlie is able to share his life message with other men:

- Nothing crushes a child's spirit like a father's anger.

- The love of God can restore a crushed spirit.
- Forgiveness releases the offender to God; God will deal with him.
- The community of faith provides support for spiritual and emotional healing.
- With these supports in place, other broken relationships can be restored.