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Meet Them Where They Are

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Meet Them Where They Are

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord (Ephesians 6:4, NLT).



▲ Melissa Ponce-Rodas

How your parents deal with you when you are most vulnerable can impact you forever. Jesus knows this, and gives us an example of what to do when He met the woman at the well in John 4. The well was a public place, where we can assume the woman suffered much ridicule, stigma and isolation. She was not there in the morning when other women were present, but in the afternoon, when the noonday sun made gathering water that much more of a chore. But that's where Jesus waited for and found her, when she was most vulnerable. How He responds to her is where the lesson is to be learned.

When reaching out to others, we often respond like Jesus. We go to the broken, telling of Jesus' forgiveness and lovingly calling them to His feet. However, when it comes to our own children, we forget to respond like Jesus at home. Sad, but true. Many families suffer, because while a parent was carrying the gospel to others, he or she forgot to live it at home. This is a factor in so many broken homes and broken children. As a psychologist, I can tell you the adage is true — it is easier to raise healthy children than to fix broken adults.

Ephesians 6:4 explains it well. God would not admonish us as parents, NOT to provoke our children to anger by the way we treat them unless He knew that in our sinful state, we would imitate the world's example which is opposed to His. While our heavenly Father treats us with patience, calm and loving admonishment, we yell, scream, threaten and teach our children to fear our wrath. Then, we justify our actions, by saying they cannot learn any other way.

They can! God tells us to discipline them, but with *instruction from the Lord*, not by *provoking them to anger*.

When are our children most vulnerable? Maybe when they make a mistake, spill the milk, have an accident, disobey us, get a bad grade, or come home late. Do we meet them in their failure, in their fear, in their shame with the Lord's discipline and instruction? Or do we berate them, critique them, compare them to others, tell them they are a failure, and maybe even threaten to disown them, provoking their anger?

I offer this advice: Every behavior has a reason. To meet someone where he or she is at, you need to be a good detective and try to find the reason for the behavior. This is where you find their vulnerability and learn to respond like Jesus. Jesus did not berate the woman for her marriages; He didn't shame her or yell and scream at her. He told her what she did, and then she believed. Be like Jesus. Understand that we often default to "provoking our children to anger" by the way we react. We must overcome in Jesus' name. Acting like Jesus leads to results like He had with the woman at the well. She and others believed and followed Him. May our actions result in our families believing and following Him. In each person's most vulnerable place, may they find a kind and loving Jesus in us. ■

Melissa Ponce-Rodas is an assistant professor of Psychology at Andrews University. She and her husband, Segundo, have twin boys, Samuel and Jonathan. Her research and advocacy revolves around the intersections of religion and domestic violence.