

“A soft answer...turns away wrath.”

PROVERBS 15:1

My mother taught junior high English. As I grew up I wondered how she did it. Unlike my junior high gym teacher who was tough, strong, and powerful, my mom was a small and gentle person who loved nothing more than reciting poetry. I figured a typical junior high class would eat her alive. When I asked her secret, she said, “The louder the students get, the quieter I speak.” I was speechless. “That’s all there is to it?” I asked. “Well, not quite,” she said. “I also love what I teach and I love the students, too.” Maybe that’s what this proverb about “soft answer turning away wrath” might be hinting at. I am not advocating a soft answer in every situation, but think of the times when your answer was not heard because of your tone, volume, or spirit. Too often an angry response to another person’s anger simply fuels the fire and the problem grows worse. A quiet response can have a calming effect, especially if it is motivated by love. My mom’s motivation wasn’t simply to calm down a rowdy classroom. She wanted to teach the subject she loved to students she cared deeply about. One of my teachers once said, “Kids have crap detectors.” They can tell when we are “full of it.” I think they can also tell when we really care. It won’t always work, but I believe that over time a soft answer plus a healthy dose of God’s love, will not only turn away wrath, it will bring real peace.

Reflection Questions:

- Where have you witnessed or felt love? Wrath?
- How do you react to a loud response versus a soft answer?

Family Activity:

On a note card write “God is with you, Child of God. God will always be with you. God loves you.” Appoint a leader in the family to repeat the words on the card softly and calmly, without showing the other family members the words on the card. This person is to be the “soft answer.” The rest of the family is to be the “wrath.” The Wrath voices should be loud and noisy in their talking and actions. The leader continues to speak in a calm and soft voice. Continue this activity for 10 minutes or until the wrath-filled voices and actions run out of energy and want to know what the “soft answer” is saying. As a family reflect on your experience and possible life-applications.

Teenage Activity:

What are the issues that get you “worked up?” There are a lot of injustices in the world, and things aren’t black and white or as easy as we once thought. Finding the ability to be the “soft answer” or even hear it can be very difficult. When in moments of wrath, (yours or another’s) remember to pause, take a deep breath and release your tensed muscles. Our hearing receptors are heightened when emotion is high which affects our ability to listen. Turn down the volume and speak quietly and peacefully with love.

Adult Activity:

Who or what makes you angry? Next time you find yourself in a moment of anger, take a deep breath and pause: Find calmness. Try to intently listen to what is really happening around you. Next time you find yourself in the middle of another’s wrath, rather than reacting, become conscious of their need for calm. Help them by speaking softly in love. Both sides will be rewarded.

Prayer:

Lord, you speak to us in a soft still voice. Help me to practice speaking and answering in soft and loving ways. Help me in situations such as...