

Devotion 7:

Our Father Gets Angry

Numbers 1—36

In my family of origin it was disobedience. If my father said to do something, it was to be done and right away. If there were any tarrying, any horsing around, then he would get angry. And we didn't want to see him get angry. When my stepfather came along, he would be set off by my mother's getting upset. If my brother or I disobeyed or disrespected mom, we encountered rage and fury from him. I recall on two occasions being lifted off the ground and being so frightened that I wet my pants.

What led to your earthly dad getting mad? What actions, what areas of the house, what prized possessions would ignite some wrath if you stepped out of bounds?

The book of Numbers presents a new side to our heavenly Father. Interestingly, this new side is seen more often in Numbers than in the previous three books of the Bible combined. This quality of our Father is not a popular characteristic to speak about in the Church or our culture today. But it cannot be ignored when these 36 chapters are read consecutively in one sitting. It is impossible to dismiss when God sends a plague with quail (11:33), makes the earth swallow up several hundred rebellious Israelites (16:31-35), sends venomous snakes among the Israelites (21:6), plans to destroy the nation (14:12), and punishes His children with a 40-year "timeout," until they all die. (14:34-35)

What in the world would lead our Father to get angry? I think we find the best clues in Numbers 14 and 32, "*The Lord said to Moses, 'How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?'*" (14:11) This conversation follows the people's response to the twelve spies' report after spying on the Promised Land. You might recall from Sunday school days that ten of the twelve spies were pessimistic.

"That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' And they said to each other, 'We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.'" (14:1-4)

Moses further explains what was behind God's anger when he tries to discourage the 2 1/2 tribes from settling in the land east of the Jordan River:

"The Lord's anger was aroused that day and he swore this oath: 'Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of the men twenty years old or more who came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised on oath to

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—not one except Caleb and Joshua, for they followed the Lord wholeheartedly.’ The Lord’s anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the desert forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone.” (32:10-13)

In Psalm 95:10-11 our Father wrote, *“For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways. So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”*

What makes our Father get angry? When His children complain (rather than thank Him), doubt (rather than trust Him), and disobey (rather than honor Him). Have you done any of these lately? Me too.

From Someone so strong, so powerful, as our heavenly Father, His anger can be petrifying. If an earthly stepfather led me to soil my clothes, I can imagine that our heavenly Father’s anger could literally kill me from terror. Where, then, is our hope?

Psalm 30:5 gives us this good word: *“For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime.”* And now is a good time to remind ourselves that our heavenly Father, unlike perhaps some earthly fathers, *“is slow to anger.”* (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; Jn. 4:2) Still, what about that *moment*? And what about when He eventually becomes angry?

“The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” (Jn. 3:35-36)

“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” (Rom. 5:9-10)

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.” (I Thess. 5:9-10)

Praise God that Jesus faced our Father’s wrath and anger in our place on the cross!
Praise God that Jesus has saved us from facing our Father’s wrath and anger when it is unleashed one final time on the evil and wicked in this world! And, to the degree that we as His children will have been harmed by the evil and the wicked in this world, praise God that our heavenly Father gets angry!

