



Tears for Breakfast

Prayerful preparation can help parents recognize predictable stress points and respond with steadier love.

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PARENTING

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I couldn't believe I yelled at my five-year-old for spilling milk. It happened so fast. The milk jug just slipped out of his hands. What a mess!

Milk covered my son and the floor, and I felt frustrated. My daughter sensed the tension and rushed out of the room. My baby's wails rang out. The milk spiller was in shock and scared of what I would do next. Everyone was upset because I was yelling—again.

Before my husband and I had kids, I vowed never to be a yeller. But somehow I had become one. I wondered what would happen in the future if I hollered about

insignificant, accidental things like this. Telling myself not to yell wasn't enough, but what could I do?

This is parenthood, where showers and sleeping seem optional, and an overwhelmed parent sometimes serves tears for breakfast when milk spills. Realizing I wanted to change what I was serving, I began studying how the Savior's example could help me with my parenting triggers. Each of our parenting journeys is different, but our source for comfort, peace, and direction can be the same. Jesus shows us the way in all things, especially in parenting.

An Inspired Lesson

After the milk incident, I spent the next couple of days in a fog, discouraged by how I had handled things. I knew I could do better, but how was I going to "fix" this part of me that yelled when I felt stressed and overwhelmed?

The question "What would Jesus do?" came to mind, but my mind went blank. I thought of the loving Jesus who was kind and compassionate, but I wasn't sure this version of Jesus could help me with my current dilemma.

That Sunday, the incident still weighed on my heart during a Sunday School lesson about the Savior and the woman caught in adultery. I had always concentrated on the Savior's compassionate response to the woman. But this time, the way He dealt with the judgmental scribes and Pharisees caught my attention.

How did Jesus stay calm? I let the scene play out in my mind. I could see the serene setting near the temple where the Savior was teaching. Visualizing the commotion the scribes and Pharisees created as they brought the sobbing woman to Jesus made my heart ache. I wondered if they were shouting to show the level of disdain they felt for her.

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The difference between how the Savior responded and how the scribes and Pharisees handled this situation was notable. The scribes and Pharisees were ready to argue and

came pointing their fingers at the woman to stir up trouble. (I have to admit, they reminded me of my kids when they accused their siblings of misbehavior!)

But Jesus didn't let the actions of the scribes and Pharisees determine how He would respond. He decided to respond intentionally in positive, calm ways rather than react in anger. Jesus didn't *react*. He *acted*.

Agency and Anger

We choose **how we act** when confronted, disappointed, frustrated, or caught off guard. As Elder Lynn G. Robbins, a General Authority in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, **taught**, one of Satan's cunning lies is to "dissociate anger from agency, making us believe that we are victims of an emotion that we cannot control." When we say, "I lost my temper," it implies we were not responsible: someone else "made" us act out in anger. But although we may be strongly provoked, we choose whether to let anger escalate and dictate our behavior.

Jesus understood this and gave us an example to follow. John **wrote** that "Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not." The scribes and Pharisees were so busy shouting accusations about the woman that they could not listen. Jesus understood this and didn't shout over them. He waited for them to be quiet. When Jesus ignored their outburst, it seemed as though it did not affect Him. This was not the reaction they expected. And so in their stunned, quiet state, His simple words were enough to **teach** "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone."

Practical Preparation

Staying calm during the outbursts of others isn't easy, but it can quickly dispel anger. Dr. Glenn Latham researched this Christlike approach. He **wrote**: "I have been astounded to find that if parents remain calm, empathetic, and direct even in the face of outrageous reviling, 97 out of 100 times, on the third directive, children will comply." It amazes me how consistently my children's anger disappears after their third attempt to engage me in an argument. If I stay calm, their anger fades.



Another thing I realized is that Jesus didn't just decide to be calm when problems arose. He took time to pray, reflect, ponder, and center Himself often. This may have been why He **went** to the Mount of Olives before going to the temple. When Jesus woke in the morning, He may not have known that angry men would confront Him while He was teaching, but He was prepared to respond intentionally.

Christ's prayers to His Father prepared Him to face the challenges of His day. When we take time to center ourselves on Christ, we will act with greater purpose rather than react to the current conditions around us. My **prayers** led me to inspect my daily interactions with my family. I took notes on how things went over the next few days. I looked at what went well and the times we struggled. Journaling in this way helped me to be more objective. Instead of just feeling bad, I looked for solutions. I also realized that I was not a complete failure as a mother, and there were many bright spots in my **days with my family**.

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I also discovered that our trouble spots often occurred at the same time and were about the same things. The Lord prompted me to make some intentional changes, like establishing a nightly routine that helped everyone know what to expect. A healthy afternoon snack reduced tears before dinner. When milk spilled at breakfast (again!), I learned to **take a deep breath**, say a quick prayer, and picture the Savior before responding. This helped me to stay calm and in control of my actions (most of the time).

Leading with Love

From studying this Bible story, I realized I had developed the mistaken belief that yelling was necessary in parenting because it seemed to yield immediate results. I also recognized that, in the long run, my lack of self-control could provoke anger and resentment in my children. By not abusing my power, I could build a better relationship with them.

Love and compassion were key to the Savior staying calm. Just imagine how scared and embarrassed the woman caught in adultery must have been. Jesus understood this.

When we are compassionate, we try to feel what others may be feeling and consider how we would want to be treated. This softens our hearts, allowing us to respond with empathy rather than anger. I thought this aspect of the Savior wouldn't help me with my dilemma. I was so wrong. Our charity towards others helps us approach contention differently.

Jesus loved the scribes and Pharisees. I had overlooked this. These contentious men were also God's children. Jesus was patient and looked for the best way to reach them.

He remained compassionate despite the scribes and Pharisees' attempts to get Him off track. It's easy to get off track when children are yelling, screaming, or throwing a tantrum. The key is to stay focused on the actual issue. Jesus stayed focused and ignored the noise. He could then discuss important principles with those around Him.

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Jesus's questions and calmness helped these men consider their own actions. Jesus gave them time to reflect while He bent down and continued writing in the dirt. His question pricked their hearts. It was something the men couldn't argue with, and they went away.

Jesus also modeled a vital parenting principle: Jesus reproved in private and praised in public. After the accusers left, He knelt near the woman and asked her questions. He didn't congratulate the accusers for finding a sinner; instead, He **encouraged** the woman to change: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." Condemnation would not have helped this woman to change, but the Savior knew that love could. As the Joseph Smith Translation **notes**, "the woman glorified God from that hour, and believed on his name." Love brought about lasting change.

A More Excellent Way

What can I do to bring about lasting change? Learning from Jesus's example, I can ask my children better questions instead of just telling them what to do. Giving children the responsibility of thinking about their own actions can help them learn to choose good for themselves.

The milk incident happened over twenty years ago, and I am still trying to master my actions. Once in a while, the “yeller” returns, but I have made progress. I now view the times I get upset as opportunities to grow instead of an excuse to feel bad.

Recently, one of my daughters was having a rough morning before a volleyball tournament. She yelled about the early hour. She yelled about not being able to find her “stupid” socks. And she yelled about having to go to her sister’s “stupid” tournament.

I chose to stay calm and compassionate. I didn’t argue or try to fix her “stupid” words in the moment.

A few days later, she asked me, “Mom, why didn’t you yell back?”

I told her, “I’m trying to be more like Jesus. He frequently had people yelling at Him, but He didn’t yell back. He chose to be calm instead of reacting in anger.”

She smiled and said, “Mom, you did that the other morning. I think I can do that, too.”

The Savior’s example of staying calm inspires. When we respond as He did, we not only become more like Him, but we invite others to feel His love and follow Him. We feel the joy that only comes from following Him. I may still occasionally burn the toast and undercook the eggs, but thanks to the Great Tutor, the “tears for breakfast” are becoming a thing of the past.

About the author

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Sherene Van Dyke is a wife, grandmother, and flawed mother of five who sometimes served her children tears for breakfast until she turned to Jesus Christ with her parenting concerns. She has been a mother in eight states and three countries. She loves spending time with family and is the author of Christ-Centered Intentional Parenting.