

Host: John slammed his fist on the desk. “Why can’t people just do what they are supposed to?” he fumed. On the other side of the house, his wife Ashley was busy cleaning up the kitchen. No one saw her moistening eyes as they fought back a flood of tears.

Welcome to Champions Arise. I’m your host _____.

Today we continue a series of programs that are looking at why adults with divorced parents often struggle to have healthy and lasting relationships. Our coach, Kent Darcie, the founder of Adult Children of Divorce Ministries, provides resources for those from broken homes to help break the cycle of divorce.

Anger is a major issue for adults with divorced parents. Over the next two programs we’ll review some of the reasons why anger is often connected to their parent’s divorce. We will also look at effective methods to control and reduce the anger so please stay with us.

Music Theme out

Host: We hear news reports about the anger in our society daily, but here at Champions Arise we are particularly concerned with the negative impact of anger in the home. Coach, you’ve added a new dimension to this issue with the divorce factor. Are adults with divorced parents aware of their anger?

Coach: In many cases, yes, but they aren’t connecting the anger to their parents’ divorce. At the beginning of today’s program, John knew he was angry. However, he blames his anger on his wife, or the incompetent person at the store, or the driver that cut him off. If he were to dig deeper, John would find that his anger has roots in his parents’ divorce.

Host: In the first teaching in this series, you told us how blame and loss can create anger in children of divorce. Are there other causes?

Coach: Yes. A big one is what I call “the loyalty challenge”. The loyalty challenge is happens when a child *or adult* is forced to choose between his mom and dad for something. An example of this is when a parent or court representative asks the child to decide who they want to live with.

A more common instance is a situation I faced. My parents and siblings all live out of state in different places. On one occasion, they all visited us; my dad, stepmom, mom, and siblings. On Sunday morning I was leading the congregation in singing. When they arrived, my family filled an entire pew. Mom was on one end of the pew, my wife was near the middle, and Dad and his wife were on the other side. Here was my dilemma; when I finished, who should I sit next to, Mom or Dad?

Host: And you were an adult when this happened

Coach: Yes. Adults with divorced parents experience this situations often. But let me show you how the anger creeps in by tweaking the situation a little bit.

We’ll go back to John from the opening of today’s program. John is now ten years old and facing the loyalty challenge at a band concert. He has finished playing his piece and the teacher tells the students to go sit with their parents. John’s mom is sitting on one side of the room and his dad and girlfriend are sitting on the other side. Who does he sit with?

Host: That is a brutal choice.

Coach: With long term consequences. Here's a glimpse of what ten-year-old John is thinking:

"I want to sit with my dad because I hardly get to see him, but Mom wants me with her because she is mad at Dad. *And* she hates Molly. But if I sit with Mom, my dad will be upset because he says he hardly gets to see me. *And* he wants me to like his girlfriend, but I like Mom. I'd really like to sit with Dad, but if I do I will hurt Mom." But if I sit with my mom I'll hurt Dad. Remember, John is ten years old.

The day after John's loyalty challenge, someone in school grabs John's pencil. John hits him. The teacher asks "Why did you hit him?" "I don't know" is John's response. He is too young to realize how frustrated and angry he is from taking the loyalty challenge the night before.

Unfortunately, when John grows up something will happen or someone will do something and he'll react with anger. If you ask him why he's angry he will blame people or things, but the real reason is the unresolved anger from his parents' divorce.

Host: Coach, it makes perfect sense when you lay it out like that. But I have to say that we are in our third program of this series and I'm still amazed that I'm hearing much of this information for the first time

Coach: That's why I appreciate opportunities like this to get this information out. I feel called by God to share these truths so that the hurt and cycle of divorce can stop.

Host: And anger can play a large part in that cycle.

Coach: Yes. The Bible says "do not let sin go down on your anger", but many adults with divorced parents unknowingly carry that anger to bed every night.

Host: So what is our next cause?

Coach: Lack of control can be a source of anger in children of divorce. Prior to the divorce, kids see the daily routine, their safety, and their security as normal and thrive in this environment. The world revolves around them and they feel like they are in control of their environment. And I mean this in a healthy way.

Divorce creates lots of changes. Loss of routine, increased insecurity and others, but a major change is the refocus of the parents from the child's needs to their own. After the divorce, decisions are made based on the parent's agenda. For example, visitation is based on the parents' schedule. Things like playing sports can be affected simply because due to every other weekend visitations, the child can't get to practice.

Changing schools, friends, churches, can be traumatic for kids. They feel like their world is totally out of control and anger builds.

Host: Ok. I see where visitation is unique to divorced kids. But many families have to move for various reasons. These moves can also result in changes to friends, churches, and schools.

Coach: That's true. But remember to look at this from the child's perspective. A situation where dad's job requires the family to relocate might be perceived as a hassle, particularly by a teenager, but it is necessary.

A dad or mom who *chooses* to leave their family is making a voluntary choice. So the negative changes that result aren't seen as necessary. They seem like punishment on an innocent bystander.

Likewise, many families make changes that result in new friends, churches, schools, but they make those decisions as a parental unit. After a divorce, the friend of the court is making decisions for the uncooperative parents that impact the kid's lives significantly.

Unfortunately, when the child of divorce grows up, the apparent lack of control continues. Now he faces holidays or special occasions, like weddings or birthdays, with apprehension. The competing demands of parents, step-parents, ex step-parents make him feel like he still has no control over his life.

The frustration at having to deal with these situations continues and anger is the byproduct.

And this links to another source of anger; our parent's themselves. We can actually absorb anger from our parents.

Host: What do you mean by absorb anger from the parents?

Coach: Proverbs 22: verses 24 and 25 say, "Keep away from angry, short-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul." ¹

Unfortunately, for children of divorce, the "angry short-tempered people" can be their parents. And staying away from them is not feasible.

With the deep hurt divorce can cause, our parents can have anger, sometimes bordering on rage, that can continue for many years. This level of anger is what many adult children of divorce experienced as children and continue to see in our parents today.

But, when we are young, much of the communication we receive is non-verbal. So certain attitudes, looks, or innuendo can reinforce the angry atmosphere in the house.

For the child of divorce, anger might be aimed at the parent who left. Or they may be angry at the mom or dad for the nasty things they say about their ex-spouse—who just happens to be the mom or dad they love.

In either case, when a child or young person lives in this type of environment, it's easy to be angry, simply through osmosis. As the scripture said, "they learn to be like them."

But anger itself is not the total problem. The lack of a constructive outlet for the anger- being able to express it—is the reason it continues into adulthood. Additionally, unresolved anger creates susceptibility to a number of negative behaviors. Addictions to alcohol, drugs, and sex are used as a release for the anger. Behavioral and social issues are also common.

Host: And there are millions of adult children of divorce out there.

Coach: Yes. And anger is destroying many of their relationships. Here's a story I heard that illustrates the harm that can be caused.

There was a little boy who had a bad temper. One day his father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back fence. The first day the boy drove 37 nails into the fence.

Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails that he hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave scars just like these.

This is a sobering thought when we think of the words we've said to our wives, sons, and daughters.

The Bible has very clear teachings on anger:

Proverbs 22: verses 24 and 25 says "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, Lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul."

Proverbs 29 verse 22 says, An angry person starts fights; a hot-tempered person commits all kinds of sin.³

So how can we overcome anger instead of it overcoming us? Next time we will discuss tools that can help us conquer anger.

Music Theme in

HOST: At Champions Arise, we know that anger can be a destructive force in a man's life. That is why we bring programs like this to our listeners. To learn more about this series or catch lessons you missed, please go to our website www.championsarise.org. Click on "Breaking the Cycle of Divorce" link to access important resources.

We hope you'll join us next time, and invite a friend to listen, as we continue our discussion on adult children with divorced parents and their anger.

I'm _____, for _____ thanking you for taking time to listen to Champions Arise. May God bless you.

Music Theme out

¹{TLB}

³{NLT}

⁴{ESV}