

How can I be less angry with my children? Is impatience simply part of my personality? What can I do with the feelings of jealousy I sometimes feel toward my husband? How can I make important parenting decisions without fear? These are important questions that many moms ponder. Fortunately, God has provided us moms (and others) a specific tool for dealing with emotions and thoughts that need correcting, changing or eliminating. It's based on 2 Cor. 10: 4&5 "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (NIV) Hormones, circumstances and family history can give rise to various undesirable emotions, but we do not need to be ruled by them. Taking thoughts captive is a crucial parenting skill and one that our children need to master as well.

Let's say our family had a hard time getting into the van in a timely fashion. It appears that we will be a bit late for an appointment. I've already determined long ago that speeding is not appropriate, so that's not an option. As I drive along, my stomach tightens with impatience. My comments with the children are short and mean. The Holy Spirit reminds me that this impatience will not help anything and is not according to His plan for me. "Love is patient..." (from 1 Cor. 13) "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Phil. 4:6, NAS) So, taking the impatient thought captive, I give it to the Lord. I actually picture in my mind my hand reaching up to my head and grabbing the thought out, holding it up to the Lord and releasing it. I pray, "Lord, take this thought captive." My stomach relaxes. God replaces the impatience with His patience. A few moments later, the impatient feeling in my stomach has cropped up again. I take it captive again and God gives me patience. I am making my every thought obedient to Christ. And He is transforming me step by step to be more like Himself.

The skill of being diligent to take every thought captive is one that comes easier with practice. Sometimes a feeling or thought needs to be captured every few moments, and then again later that day, or again when the same situation arises. But this is serious business. We are to be diligent and constantly vigilant. I've learned that this is a skill of spiritual warfare. Satan would love for us to wallow in our anger, impatience, jealousy, laziness, greed, etc. But God wants us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (from Romans 12:2). Applying His word in this specific way reaps great benefits. And it's a skill our children can learn and practice quite young.

Here's another example. Joel feels he's been slighted by a sibling. He stands, lips tightly pursed, brows knit. He's stewing about the matter, pondering what he might do in retaliation. I recognize the pose and stop him mid-grump. "You know that yucky feeling you're feeling in your stomach right now?" He nods slightly. "Take it captive and give it to the Lord." I show him visually how to grab that nasty thought and toss it to the Lord. (and do it again and again until the thoughts are gone). Children can understand the value and scriptural basis for taking thoughts captive. And practice helps it come easier. Parents need to help children learn to recognize an inappropriate emotion and can help them put a name to it. "What you're feeling right now is vengeance. Take it captive to the Lord and ask Him to replace it with forgiveness." The more I train my children in this, the better they get and the better I get at it myself. And I continue to find more and more opportunities to use this skill as life goes on.

*** I'm on the couch feeling comfortable and lazy. A need arises and my first thought is disgust. I want the needy one to feel bad for disrupting my rest. But recognizing the inappropriate meanness and laziness, I take captive these wrong attitudes and ask God to replace them with His attitudes of servanthood and diligence. In one moment I may need to take these thoughts captive again and again until they are completely gone.

***My husband calls from his business trip with a wonderful description of the beautiful conference center he's staying at and the delicious banquet he just came from. The baby has just blurped on my shoe as I talk to him and the peanut butter sandwiches we ate for supper hang heavy in

my stomach. Feelings of jealousy begin to creep into my thoughts and threaten to enter the conversation. I recognize it for what it is and take the jealous thought captive. God will bless me with fun pleasantries another time. This is my husband's time to enjoy them. He doesn't need my jealousy! Neither do I. I'm thankful God has given us a tool to deal with these inappropriate feelings. I can't deal with them myself.

***We've just received a "reminder" that one of our children is due for a vaccination. I remember articles and books I've read over the years about the dangers associated with vaccinations. I wonder, "What if we make the wrong choice and our child suffers from it?" My anxiety level soars and my stomach tightens. But I'm learning to recognize this feeling of anxiety and to immediately take it captive, then again and again. My stomach relaxes. God has promised to give us wisdom when we ask in faith (James 1). I may not have the full answer right now, but I can pray and wait without fear. When the fear crops up again, I take it captive again. Spiritual warfare.

Dear Moms, this is such an important mothering skill. There are spiritual battles going on constantly and we must master the skills necessary to meet the attacks, for ourselves and for our families. If "taking every thought captive in obedience to Christ" is not already part of your spiritual warfare arsenal, ask God today to show you an opportunity to practice it.