

A CHAIN REACTION

"I can't believe I did it again-what's wrong with me!?" Not waiting for an answer John(1) continued to speak. "My wife said she has no respect for me anymore." His self-disgust soon turned to shame and then to tears. Lifting his head he sobbed, "Please help me, please help me." Having known John for years, I was completely puzzled as to what he could have done to feel so devastated.

Once John regained composure he revealed that he had exploded into a maniacal rage at dinner the night before. "I had asked my son to take his elbows off the table while he was eating. He looked at me and just sneered. I don't know what happened from that point on. I just remember jumping up and lunging across the table. I grabbed him around the throat. Plates and food went everywhere. Betty(2) said she screamed at me to let him go but I didn't hear her. I didn't let go until he began to cry. He was terrified. Oh my God, how could I do such a thing?"

John admitted that this wasn't the first time that he had been out of control. "The times before I've just yelled. I've said some awfully cruel thing to my wife and kids. I'm so angry and I can't seem to control myself. Will you help me?"

"You know I will John. I love you. The first thing that you'll need to understand is that you don't reach that point of being out of control all at once. It comes in stages. When you think of your problem, you picture yourself totally out of control, screaming and yelling at your family. A better way of looking at it would be as a chain with links in it. The screaming and yelling, of course, would come toward the end of the chain. Let me ask you a question, John. If you were going to break this chain, where would be the best place?" John smiled and answered. "That's easy, at the beginning. If I wait until the end of the chain, well, you know what happens." "That's exactly right, John. It is much easier to break the earliest link in the chain of events. But the trick is knowing when and how the chain gets started. Let's look at last night's explosion. Backtrack for me."

"Hmmm. I remember things were okay until I got to work. Oh, yeah. My boss crawled my case again. He is such a pain! According to him I don't do anything right. I think he wants to fire me." "John, let me jump in here for a second. Has this been an ongoing thing between you and your boss?" Nodding his head he said, "Yeah, why?" "Well, it may be that this is a triggering event. Do you find that through the day you mull over what he says to you? You know, brood about it?" Somewhat sheepishly John responded, "Now that you mention it, I guess I do. I find that I think about it a lot. When I drive home I sometimes catch myself giving him a piece of my mind. If I said anything at work I'd be history." "I see what you mean. It's safer to keep it inside, huh? John, I'm wondering what it is like when you get home?" Sighing deeply John said, "Oh, man. It's a three ring circus. It seems all the neighborhood kids want to hang out at our house. When I get there they are all piled up on the floor playing Nintendo. My wife wants to tell me everything that has gone wrong, particularly with the kids. I'm supposed to handle it. Man, that's the last thing I want to do when I get home!" "John, are you thinking what I'm thinking? I'm beginning to see a chain that we need to break. Let's work on nipping it in the bud so you won't continue to have this chain reaction. As I see it, you are going to have to resist the temptation to clam up and brood over your boss's remarks. Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 make it clear that clamming up is sin and it provides Satan a foothold in your heart. He takes advantage of you at that point by fanning your smoldering fire. God says that you are going to

have to learn to confront your boss in a proper way. Don't worry. I'll help you figure out what you might say and how you might say it. In fact, you and I might want to role play it". John's color began to turn pale. "But what if I blow it and don't confront him?" You know, if I just keep it all inside and just carry it home with me?" "John, it is important that you understand that if you fail to resist the temptation at the first link, you don't have to let it run all the way to the end. You can break it the moment you realize that vicious thoughts of revenge are rumbling around in you. Instead of allowing the sinful thoughts to continue, stop and ask God's forgiveness. And ask for His grace to redirect your thoughts to things that would please Him. If you miss the opportunity to prevent it, then at least try to curtail it. I think you'll find , John, that the more frequently you prevent the sin, the less frequently you'll need to curtail it; and the more frequently you curtail it, the sooner you'll be able to prevent it altogether. What do you say we get together in a day or so and work out the details? I've got a feeling that things are going to be quite different for you!"

1. pseudonym
2. pseudonym