

## Star Light, Star Bright

**Question:** I feel like my family has become a bunch of bickering, irritable people.

We are quick to snap at each other when something doesn't go our way and we angrily debate the smallest, most petty issues. My children fuss and fume over the silliest of things. It is not a pleasant environment at all! And it definitely doesn't seem like the way a Christian family should operate. Any suggestions for getting out of this rut?



**Response:** Growing up in a big Canadian city, I remember many childhood nights, sitting on our porch looking up at the stars. My father would point out the different constellations and even encouraged me to do a school project about stars. Stars shining in a dark night were beautiful to me!

Your question brought this memory back along with an interesting Bible text that compares God's family to stars. This same text warns of two habits that will cloud

the believer's "star quality." Philippians 2:14 – 16: *Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.*

It sounds like the members in your household have "lost their shine" by getting into a rut of grumbling or arguing. Grumbling (complaining, griping, fussing, whining or bellyaching) kills joy in an individual's life and their gloomy attitude can easily rub off on others. Some people seem to never be happy about anything. Even if something is good, they moan that it should be better.

A negative old lady was watching her little granddaughter playing in the water at the beach. All of a sudden, a huge wave came crashing over the little girl. When the water receded the little girl was nowhere to be seen. She had vanished. Her grandmother raised her fists to the sky and screamed, "Lord, how could You? Haven't I been a good person? Haven't I given money to the church and tried to live a life You would be proud of?"

A minute passed and another huge wave crashed on the beach. As the water receded, the little girl was standing there, smiling, splashing around as if nothing had ever happened. A loud voice boomed from the sky, "I have returned your granddaughter. Are you satisfied?" The old woman responded, "But where's the hat she was wearing?"

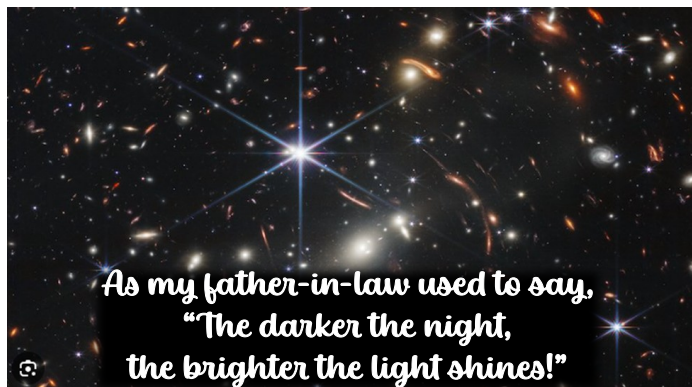
Folks grumble about the weather, aches and pains, politics, high prices, not getting their own way, etc. Such whining and fussing extinguishes the light that could instead be reflecting Jesus' joy and contentment.

The second "light-stealer" that God warns against is arguing (disputing, fighting, feuding, bickering, etc.).

Some people seem to enjoy picking a fight. Express an opinion or idea to such a person and they will most likely contradict. It is as if they get some kind of satisfaction out of being contrary. And of course, once a clash with such a person begins, they don't ever want to lose, so the arguing can go on and on.

We met a couple many years ago who, at that time, had been married over 40 years. We congratulated them on being married for so many years. The husband responded, "Well, thank you, but it has been 40 years of fighting!" He proceeded to tell us about a very-minor incident which had occurred the first day after their honeymoon. The wife had taken offense. The husband declared he had done nothing wrong. Both were stubborn. They were still arguing about it 40 years later!

This is not what God wants. Grumbling and arguing are big black storm clouds that hide our light as His stars.



Thankfully, God gives the solution to both of these star-darkeners in his "Word of life." The solution to grumbling is gratitude. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks..." Notice that we are instructed to give thanks "in" everything, not "for" everything. All of us will encounter bad and difficult situations during our lifetimes. God doesn't ask us, His children, to thank Him **for** things that are not part of His plan... but He says we can choose to have a thankful attitude even **in the midst of** such challenges.

Like the character in the children's book, Pollyanna, we would all do well to begin playing "the glad game." Challenge your family members, and yourself as well, to identify something for which to be thankful even in tough situations. Gratitude is God's instant antidote to grumbling.

The solution to arguing is making peace, being agreeable, settling disputes, not fomenting them. There is a proverb that says, *A gentle answer quiets anger, but a harsh one stirs it up (Proverbs 15:1)*. Another says, *Kind words bring life, but cruel words, crush a man's spirit (Proverbs 15:4)*. Jesus Himself encouraged us to be *peace-makers (Matthew 5:9)*! God wants His children to proactively work to quiet arguments and restore harmony.

This happens most effectively when we choose to speak positive words in a pleasant tone of voice. This requires a decision to let go of resentment, and to forgive. Granted, this does not come naturally to human beings. But it is absolutely possible when we choose to listen to the voice of God's Spirit that whispers in our minds how to respond in the heat of the moment.

When your family members begin to argue, call a time out and then discuss possible statements which would be helpful to calm the riled emotions. Ask what Jesus might say in a similar circumstance. Encourage each one to practice these statements. Give affirmation and/or rewards when you see children choosing to halt fights with soothing words that promote peace. When a family develops God's peace-making skills, the arguments will dwindle.

When I was a teenager, I worked one summer at a Christian retreat center in northern Ontario. One evening our staff supervisor led all of us workers on a hike through the dense forest. With flashlights, we wound our way through trees, up over hills and finally arrived at a hidden lake, deep in the woods. We settled ourselves on blankets and then our boss told us to turn off our flashlights. What I saw that night were the brightest stars I had ever seen... in the black of that night, the dazzling brilliance of the stars was breathtaking!

We live in dark times, spiritually. Many Christians are right in the middle of some "dark" situation. Remember, grumbling and arguing only worsen the darkness. However, as my father-in-law used to say, "The darker the night, the brighter the light shines!" Philippians 2:14-16 encourages us to *hold firmly to the word of life*. When we apply God's principles... giving thanks, making peace... we (God's stars) shine more brightly in a dark, dark night. And that is a sight our world is longing to see!

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