

# Tracing Your Hot Button's Wiring to its Source



**Looking Beneath the 'Hot Buttons' in Our Lives to  
the Root Causes - and How to Find Deliverance!**

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## Hot Buttons: Responses Rooted in Issues of the Past

Do you have any hot buttons in your life? Hot buttons are those areas where you're easily angered or upset, where you tend to react irrationally to certain people or situations. These negative responses are wired into the personality, often because of unresolved issues in the past. Ironically, it's often your hot buttons that best indicate what the Holy Spirit is trying to do in your life.

Let's consider the most common hot button: anger. The book of Proverbs gives us many examples of this reactive emotion:

*"He that is soon angry deals foolishly."* (Proverbs 14:17)

*"He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalts folly."* (Proverbs 14:29)

*"A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."* (Proverbs 15:1)

*"A wrathful man stirs up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeases strife."* (Proverbs 15:18)

The hot button of anger is quite common. In fact, when you allow anger to emote through you, you can easily stir up anger in others. Have you ever noticed how easy it is to get angry and frustrated with people who are themselves angry and frustrated? For those who are married, has your spouse ever become angry and frustrated while you remained calm...for a while? Finally, you end up getting angry and frustrated, too, and the argument becomes about who was angry first! It's amazing how anger can reduce us to acting like five year olds! How difficult it can be for us to not react in anger when someone pushes our buttons!

*“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit better than he that takes a city.” (Proverbs 16:32)*

### Everyone’s Hot Buttons Are Unique to Them

Everyone’s hot buttons are unique to them. There are things you might do to me that don’t bother me, but may bother someone else. There are things that don’t trouble you at all that will tempt me to react in anger. Each person’s buttons are wired into their personalities for different reasons. This is one reason intimate fellowship with others is so important. Proverbs 27:17 says that *“iron sharpens iron.”* God puts us with one another in the context of the church. He knows that it takes open and vulnerable relationships to bring to light those areas in our lives where we find it hard to forgive or to quickly let an offense go.

It’s quite easy to live a peaceful life when you have nothing to do with anyone else. If you live alone and have little or no close fellowship with others, your buttons won’t get pushed. But, don’t be deceived; that doesn’t mean they’re not there! Still, avoiding close contact with others is the way many people deal with their relational problems. They simply avoid or reject people who push their buttons, endeavoring to only associate with people who don’t cause any unpleasant reactions in their lives. The Holy Spirit, however, wants to help you see the areas in your life that are not under His control. He has a way of working someone into your circle of acquaintances that you would otherwise avoid. Why does He do that? So that they can push those hot buttons in yourself that you don’t realize you have. He wants you to see that you are not quite as spiritual as you think.

### I Had My Own Hot Buttons

After graduating from college, I decided to go into sales. So, I signed up for a course to learn how to be a successful salesman. When I went home for Christmas that year, I proudly announced my plans to my family. My brother immediately turned to me and said, “You can’t be in sales; you’re too thin-skinned.” That really hurt me. My skin was so thin that I couldn’t be told I was thin-skinned without it

hurting my feelings! My brother's remark helped me realize that I had a lot of hot buttons that caused overly emotional reactions to certain situations.

So, I began to ask the Lord to "thicken my skin." Being in sales ended up being very good for me. It forced me to walk through uncomfortable situations and learn to relate to people. Sometimes the only way you can overcome a fear is to walk through it.

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,"* King David said in the twenty third Psalm, *"I will fear no evil."* He had to walk through the valley to learn not to fear. People who choose to never leave the green pastures of their lives never really find freedom from the strongholds of anxiety and rejection. In fact, it's possible for people to go through their entire lives and never deal with their hot buttons. They go to their graves getting their buttons pushed continually; or, they spend their lives avoiding button-pushers, all the while pretending there's no problem.

But, there is an alternative! You can pull out the wiring that causes your buttons to be 'hot.' How? By acknowledging and dealing with the underlying issues that cause your reactions to certain people and situations. In order for this to occur, it's important to see the source of your reactions. It's hard to confess and take responsibility for something until you see it. Yet, the very key to getting free is taking responsibility for the sin that lies at the root of the problem.

### Moses Had Hot Buttons

Even Moses had hot buttons. The Psalms recount an incident where the Israelites were able to provoke Moses to the point where he reacted in anger:

*"They angered him at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes. They provoked his spirit and he spoke unadvisedly with his lips."* (Psalm 106:32-33)

Moses, the ‘meekest man on earth,’ got his buttons pushed and spoke out words that grieved the Lord. As a result, God forbade him to go into the Promised Land. Paul tells us in Romans 6:7 that “...*he that is dead is freed from sin.*” Something in Moses was obviously not yet dead. The children of Israel were able to push his buttons with their stubbornness and rebellion. Moses himself was probably surprised to see his own reactions. So it so often is with us. When we are surprised to find ourselves angry and reacting in situations, it’s a clear indication that there are undealt with issues somewhere in our souls. When we look at Jesus, we find He had no hot buttons in His life.

### Jesus Had No Buttons To Push!

*“The high priest asked Jesus of his disciples and of his doctrine. Jesus said, “I spoke openly to the world and taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, where the Jews resort. In secret have I said nothing. Why do you ask me? Ask them which heard me, what I have said to them: they know what I said.” Then, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do you answer the high priest so?” Jesus said, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why did you smite me?” (John 18:19-23)*

If someone struck you in this manner, how would you have responded? Would you have been as meek as Jesus was in such an unjust situation? Or would you react back with anger, making fists and getting ready for a fight? How difficult it can be for us to respond calmly and lovingly when we have been smitten by mere words. Yet, Jesus didn’t react even when he was physically slapped and abused, though I’m sure he was at times tempted to do so. Contrast this scene with Jesus and the High Priest with a similar scene that occurred in the life of the Apostle Paul some years later.

## Paul, on the Other Hand, Had His Own Hot Buttons

*And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. Then the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, “God shall smite you, you whited wall: for do you sit to judge me after the law, and command me to be smitten contrary to the law?” (Acts 23:1-3)*

Unlike Jesus, Paul’s initial response was from the flesh. He reacted in anger. When told that it was the High Priest that spoke to him, he quickly repented and changed his response. Nevertheless, his initial response exposed that he, too, had hot buttons.

Like Paul and Moses, our real problem is that we are not yet fully dead to ourselves. We have areas inside our souls that need to be denied, where we need to lay down our rights to retaliate when we are hurt. It’s when someone or something threatens one of those areas that something inside of us rises up. And it’s usually in those very areas that we find our hot buttons! Ecclesiastes 10:8 says, “*whoso breaks a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.*”

Let’s look at another example of hot buttons from the life of David.

### King David’s Hot Buttons Were Wired From His Youth

*“David sent out ten young men, and said to them, “Go to Carmel, find Nabal, and greet him in my name. Say to him that lives in prosperity, ‘Peace be both to you, your house, and to all that thou have. I have heard that you are shearing your sheep. When your shepherds were with us, we didn’t hurt them, neither was there anything missing from them, all the while they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will confirm this. So please, let these young men find favor in your*

*eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I ask, whatever comes to your hand to your servants, and to your son David.’” David’s young men went and spoke to Nabal these words of David. Nabal answered and said, “Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days that break away from his master. Shall I take my bread, water, and flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men whom I do not know?” So David’s young men came and told him what happened. David then said, “Gird on your swords. So they girded on their swords. David also girded on his sword. There went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff.” (1 Samuel 25:5-13)*

Nabal acted like a real jerk to David and his men. They had done him a good turn in watching over his men and their sheep through many a long night, protecting them from thieves and robbers, and now they simply wanted some consideration. But, when they received scorn and contempt instead, David’s reaction was overly extreme. Is this the sweet psalmist of Israel crying, “Where’s my sword?” What we are undoubtedly seeing here, as indicated by David’s violent response, is that Nabal pushed a hot button in his life. Reading the whole story, you’ll find that, fortunately for David, Nabal’s wife Abigail intercepted him and kept him from bloodshed.

So, why was David so angry with Nabal, to the point of wanting to kill him? David didn’t respond that way to Saul, who tried numerous times to kill him. In fact, where Saul was concerned, David’s heart was so tender that his conscience smote him for simply cutting the corner off of Saul’s robe. But, in this incident with Nabal, David’s flesh rose up in vengeance and anger.

In searching the scriptures for an explanation of David’s ‘out-of-character’ behavior, we see one possibility from his youth. Years before, when David was keeping his father’s sheep, his older brothers were all out battling the Philistines. David’s father sent him to bring food to where they were camped with the rest of the army of Israel. When he arrived, he found them, along with the rest of the men, intimidated by the giant Goliath. When David asked what was going on, his older brother responded angrily to him:

*“David spoke to those standing near him, ‘What will be done for the man who kills the Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Just who is this uncircumcised Philistine who defies the armies of the living God?’ The people told him about the offer, saying, ‘That is what will be done for the man who kills him.’ David’s oldest brother Eliab heard this, and became angry with him. ‘Why did you come down here?’ he asked. ‘Who did you leave those sheep with in the wilderness? I know your arrogance and your evil heart - you came down to see the battle!’ David said, ‘What have I done now?’” (1 Samuel 17:26-29)*

David’s response to Eliab, “What have I done now?” indicates that there may have been other altercations between the two. Maybe Eliab had a history of being “on David’s case.” But, of particular interest, is that Eliab acts much the same way here as David does later with Nabal. Remember, David’s response to Nabal was, “How dare he act that way with me? I’ll kill him!” Compare that with Eliab’s response to David, “How dare he leave the sheep and come here to bother us!” The attitudes are similar. Could it be that David had an old resentment against his brother, and that this resentment was the wiring to the hot button Nabal later pushed? When someone in his adult life made him feel the same way his brother had made him feel as a youth, David reacted with violent, vengeful anger.

### Our Early Choices Result in Hot Buttons Later in Life

*“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. Christ said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (Romans 2:1)*

Many times we’re tempted to hold on to resentments or grievances against someone because of the way they’ve treated us. And, we may self-righteously feel

that we are justified in our hard feelings and anger. However, when we do this, we have unknowingly wired a hot-button inside. The truth is, someday we may find ourselves doing the very things that we so judged someone else for doing.

I believe it was God who put Nabal in David's path - to help him see the potential he had to act the same way his older brother had acted towards him. We don't know if David ever came to that revelation. The truth is, he probably had no idea why his actions toward Nabal were so 'out-of-character.' How about you? Do you know why you sometimes react with anger or other emotions that are 'out-of-character' to the way you normally are?

It's just a fact of life that we all will get hurt, judged or misunderstood by others. What we do with those feelings that come up often determines how things will go with us for the rest of our lives. Unfortunately, most tend to either stuff feelings to avoid the pain, or else turn to some diversion or addiction for comfort.

When I was a teen-ager, what I hated more than anything else was to be grounded and have to stay at home. I grew up in a small town and lived for the freedom of the weekends. I still remember an occasion where I knew that my mom was going to ground me for some offense, and there was no way out of it. In anticipation of my punishment, I bought a pornographic magazine and hid it. While the pornography of that time would be like a fashion magazine today, it was still pornography. When my mother told me about my punishment, I had the magazine stashed away, and I remember thinking, "Well, I may be grounded, but I'll still have a this magazine to look at."

I believe that at that moment, in my rebellion, I opened a door. Rather than honoring my mom and looking at my offense, I instead turned my heart from her and ran to something for comfort. In doing so, I opened the door to pornography in my life. This sin was a real struggle for me in the early years of my Christian life.

What about you? When you were hurt or punished, did you run to anything for comfort? It could have been food or gossip or fantasy, or maybe you just judged and blamed. Whenever we turn to something for comfort when we are confronted with sin, whether ours or someone else's, we potentially wire a hot button that can still be 'hot' years later.

Many of us are suffering the consequences of choices from our past. Before we can be set free, we must discover to what our hot buttons are wired. We may engage in a particular negative behavior pattern for years, but it's not until we see the unpleasant consequences of our actions that we begin to get serious about dealing with the problem. Sometimes God will let us fully reap what we sow. This may, at times, be the only way we'll learn. Mom and Dad will tend to get serious about certain issues when they begin to see their own problems replicated in their children's personalities.

#### James and John's Hot Buttons

*“When the days were coming to a close for Him to be delivered up, Jesus was determined to journey to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead of Him, and on the way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for Him. But the Samaritans did not welcome Him, because He was determined to journey on to Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?” But He turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.” (Luke 9:51-56)*

Now we know why Jesus nicknamed these two disciples James and John the 'Sons of Thunder.' These two brothers obviously had a hot button that was pushed by the Samaritans' lack of welcome to Jesus. This is the same John who later wrote the 'epistle of love,' wanting to call down fire on men, women and children. Let's look at another example.

*John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us." "Don't stop him," said Jesus, "because there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name who can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For whoever is not against us is for us." (Mark 9:38-40)*

John's attitude here is, "Wait a second, we're the apostles, who are you? You don't have the authority to do this!" He didn't want anyone but the elite few to have the power to cast out demons. Again, it's evident that John had some hot buttons wired to his personality. First, he wanted to call down fire on people. Then, he wanted to stop others from moving in the power he thought only the chosen few should have. In closely examining the scriptures, we can trace the wiring in James and John's hot buttons and better understand their behavior.

*"The mother of Zebedee's sons approached Jesus with her sons (James and John). She knelt down to ask Him for something. 'What do you want?' He asked her. 'Promise,' she said to Him, 'that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and the other on Your left, in Your kingdom.' But Jesus answered, 'You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' 'We are able,' they said to Him. He told them, 'You will indeed drink My cup. But to sit at My right and left is not Mine to give; instead, it belongs to those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.' When the ten other disciples heard this, they became indignant. But Jesus called them over and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles dominate them, and the men of high position exercise power over them. It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life - a ransom for many.'" (Matthew 20:20-28)*

It's apparent that James and John's mother was quite ambitious for her boys. We don't see any of the other disciples' mothers coming to Jesus on their behalf. This mother, however, not only had the audacity to do so, but did so in front of the others. Many times our hot buttons are wired because of attitudes and values we pick up from our parents. The way we're raised often sets wiring in place that affects us all our lives.

We know that James and John's father, Zebedee, owned boats, and was possibly a prosperous man. They were likely raised in an atmosphere of ambition and privilege, engendering in them an attitude of superiority and elitism. Today, as well, many people think that their financial situation or their family heritage makes them better than others. The Bible calls this the 'pride of life.' Consider that neither the mother, nor the brothers, seemed to realize how insensitive it was to make this request in front of the other disciples. This may be because they felt the superior position to be their natural place. Nevertheless, this feeling of privilege wired hot buttons in their personalities that got pushed anytime someone got in their way.

How did Jesus defuse the hot buttons in his two disciples? It's obvious from scripture that John had a special relationship with Jesus. He called himself, *'The disciple whom Jesus loved.'* The two seemed to share a unique intimacy. This affinity was such that Jesus entrusted his own mother to John's care as He was dying on the cross. I believe that John's love for Jesus, and his closeness to Him, finally killed off this old sense of superiority and elitism. You can't find a shred of this attitude when you read John's epistles. Instead, they are the epitome of sensitivity to others.

James, however, was one of the very first martyrs of the Church. Why would one of Jesus' inner circle, as James was along with Peter and his brother John, be allowed to be lost to the Church so early in its formation? It makes you wonder if maybe the old attitudes did not die in James as they did in John, and that because

of this Jesus knew he would be a hindrance to the new movement. Is it possible that, because James was a founding stone of the Church that still operated out of pride, the Lord allowed him to be taken out of the way? We don't know, but the idea bears consideration.

### How To Pull Out the Wiring Behind Those Hot Buttons

*“The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory is to overlook a transgression.”* (Proverbs 19:11)

God wants us to be able to overlook the offenses of others. We are told in the Scriptures that *‘love covers a multitude of sins.’* Let me give an example of what is often behind the difficulty to do this. I once met with a husband and his wife to iron out some issues in their marriage. As happens in such meetings, it became pretty emotional. At one point, the husband turned to the wife, who was expressing some feelings concerning their relationship, and said, “You sound just like those kids in high school who used to pick on me!”

Obviously, this was an old hot button of anger in the man that his wife's actions were hitting. He was responding to her in the same way he'd responded to some high school kids years before. This is exactly what happens when we don't deal with resentments from our past. They don't just disappear or go away. The truth is, they'll sit hidden within until someone does something to bring back all the old feelings. Then, the hot button comes back to life and those hidden emotions come out with a vengeance!

So, how do we pull the wiring out of our hot buttons?

*“If you confess your sin he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9)

It's hard to confess something in yourself until you see it and are willing to take responsibility for it. It's even more difficult when you're focused on a similar failing in another. We must cry out to God to expose the reactive areas in our personalities. It's really not necessary to go through life totally ignorant about what's going on inside. It's essential that you confess any and all sins you may have committed in response to an offence from another: resentment, hardness toward the offender, vowing that you would never act that way yourself, etc. You must thoroughly deal with your sins in all of these matters to really get free.

The Holy Spirit is faithful to bring the conviction, correction and reproof we need to eliminate these areas from our lives. It is important to understand that God will allow situations to occur in your life which will bring to the surface anger and ungodly reactions. He will send people and circumstances to bring to the light attitudes and tendencies buried within. He does this to show you the things you need to deal with, the areas that need to be brought to the cross.

If you don't understand this process, you might not see what the Holy Spirit is trying to do. In fact, deliverance is really a fairly simple process. God sends His Spirit to address ungodly areas in our lives. All we need to do is faithfully respond in humility and obedience.

*"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of a man's soul."* (Proverbs 20:27)

Understanding that God wants to show you the issues behind your reactions, you can begin to pull out the wires attached to all those hot buttons and finally grow up in the Lord. Simply respond to the Holy Spirit's urgings to forgive, to let go of your rights, and ask forgiveness for the sins and offenses that he brings to your conscience, no matter how long ago they were committed.

God doesn't want us to continue reaping what we have sown. He wants to set us free from the roots up!

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