

All I Want for Christmas... Is a Peaceful Family

by Annette Friesen

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"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity." Psalm 133:1

I began to collect Norman Rockwell prints as a girl. At 17 my favorite Christmas gift was a giant book of Norman Rockwell paintings and Saturday Evening Post Covers. I loved the detail, the nostalgic scenes and faces, and I would spend hours poring over the pages.

The November 24th issue of *World Magazine* featured Norman Rockwell's painting Freedom from Want from the "Four Freedoms" series. This picture, depicting three generations enjoying a holiday meal, reminded me of why I love Rockwell's paintings. I long for loving, peaceful family moments like this.

When my mother was asked what she wanted for Christmas, she would always respond, "I just want a family that will get along together." We did have our share of conflicts and maybe that was the beginning of my fascination with Rockwell paintings. Warm meaningful moments are frequent themes of Rockwell's work, and I wanted moments like that in my family. This desire for peace in my home continued on in my adulthood. Buried deep in my decision to home school was a desire for a conflict-free family.

My strategy for peace during the holidays when I was younger was to try to create an environment that encouraged Rockwellian moments, either through food, decorations, or working hard to make things "just right." When conflict got the best of me, and I could deny the problem no longer, I would escape, at first to my room, and then as an adult, to my own home, where the problems were different, less intense. Even when conflict arose in my own home, my attempts at peace were based more on avoidance because I really didn't know how to face the problems. During the holidays, especially as the children got older, the stress and pressure of trying to make things "just right", along with home schooling, resulted in more conflict. My efforts to create peace weren't diffusing conflict, but were causing it!

How grateful I am that God has provided a way out of my holiday-conflict cycle. After years of attempting to create a conflict-free environment, I have come to understand that conflict is inevitable in a fallen world. The goal is not to eradicate conflict, (or put a Rockwellian facade on life), but to see the opportunity for God to use it for good. This opportunity begins with my responding to personal conflict in a biblical manner. This is good news in

everyday life, and even more so in the hustle and bustle of the holidays. Let me describe some peacemaking principles that will help you provide a little peace on earth in your own home this season.

The same principles which allow us to experience peace during the holidays are the same ones that will allow us to enjoy positive family relationships during the New Year.

If a conflict should arise, try using personal peacemaking principles.

1. Overlook an offense – "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." (Proverbs 19:11). Many disputes can be completely resolved by quietly overlooking an offense and forgiving the one who has wronged you. What bothers us now, might actually be a small matter, and the goal is not my way, but God's way.

2. Discussion – "If ... your brother has something against you ...go and be reconciled." (Matt. 5:23-24). Personal wrongs that are too serious to overlook should be resolved through confession or loving confrontation. Remember, though, that before we confront someone with what he has done, we must get the "log" out of our own eye by recognizing how we may have contributed to the conflict and confessing that wrong first. (Matt.7:5) Having admitted that, we can graciously talk to the other person about the matter that has come between us.

3. Negotiation – "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil.2:4). Perhaps one of the main reasons we get involved in conflict in the first place is that we want our own way and don't see anything but our own desires. This Christmas when you find yourself getting upset with someone, ask yourself what the other person might actually want and look for a way to meet a need for him or her. Inquiring graciously about the other person's interests, rather than simply pushing for our own interests can help keep a conflict from causing damage.

I still enjoy Rockwell paintings. I have an entire wall in my home dedicated to my favorites. I still strive for peace in my family, but not by recreating a perfect Norman Rockwell scene there. And I no longer routinely escape when the peace is interrupted by discord. Instead, I seek to glorify God through my response to the conflicts. May your relationships be more harmonious this Christmas and your best gift to others be that of peacemaking!

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