

True Stories: Reconciling with Mom

"Every time you encounter conflict, you have an opportunity to show what you really think of God." Ken Sande

This is powerful insight . . . think about it. The way a person responds to conflict reveals his/her concept of God. Two years ago, while our family was living in Slovakia, a book in a friend's exhaustive library caught my eye. It's called *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, written by Ken Sande... and what a discovery!!! What started as a casual interest in this subject has become a real passion as I continue to learn about being a peacemaker and conciliator.

Granted, biblical conflict resolution is hard work. It involves striving, making every effort to live peacefully with all men. It is not a casual, quick attempt at tolerating each other - it is a life commitment and very few Christians have truly internalized the reality that resolution is not an option - it is a command. Many Christians lack skill, but more tragically they lack desire to honor God with their responses in the midst of conflict, which is a universal human experience.

Our closest relationships are often the most emotionally painful and challenging to reconcile. My mother was driven by bitterness after my parents divorced when I was very young. Consequently, my brothers and I grew up responding to a woman who was very distant, argumentative, critical and unsupportive. She was also an alcoholic, which brought another damaging dynamic into our family. Mom made decisions based on a hurting heart and these decisions were very costly for my brothers and me.

It was very difficult to love my mother and there were many times when I wanted to give up. I remember the first time that I read Romans 12:18 - *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* The implications of this verse gripped my heart. If my mother were to have died that night, could I have stood before God, with the confidence that so far as it depended on me, I had done everything to live peacefully with her? I knew that I could not have answered "yes".

This one incident marked the beginning of an eight year journey of learning what it meant to love and accept a very unlovable person. It involved "taking a look at my own stuff", forgiving, and forgiving again, working through conflicts in a loving way, knowing when to overlook an offense, apologizing and many tearful times of frustration. It was often painful, emotionally draining, and always a choice to "refuel" with God when feeling defeated. Yet, there was absolute victory in the end.

When my mom died in April 1996, I received a letter from a close friend who had watched my relationship with my mom for many years. Here is an excerpt from the letter:

"Diane, I have never met anyone who made the effort in a mother/daughter relationship like you did. And against such odds. She hurt you deeply and for a long time, yet you never gave up hope. You never left her alone. You kept pursuing her and loving her and you finally won over her resistance. What a testimony to your deep love and commitment. I am sure you feel sad that things weren't different with your mom while you were growing up but there is such comfort and tremendous hope in knowing you will have all of eternity to know her

and be with her. She will really love you then, Diane! You'll know peace and joy and security in your relationship with her."

I cannot describe the overwhelming peace in my heart that I obeyed God and made every effort in my relationship with mom. The happy ending to all this is that not only did my mom and I reconcile and enjoy a new depth of love for each other but mom also gave her life to Christ three weeks before she died. I feel in my heart that my mom's salvation was as great a gift to me as it was to her. God is good; His Word is wise.

When we are hurt, our tendency is to retreat, yet God calls us to actively pursue reconciliation. Our commitment to deal with conflict biblically does not always result in reconciled relationships because both parties need to desire what God desires. However, there is the guarantee that when we have done everything, so far as it depends on us, there is immeasurable peace within and with God. Oh, that I would continue to seek peace in all my relationships and have opportunities to encourage others to be peacemakers, too.