

## **The Power of an Apology**

*By Ken Sande, President of Peacemaker Ministries*

Every once in a while, God allows me to experience an event that reminds me of the power of an apology.

A couple of weeks ago, on the afternoon before I was leaving on an eight-day trip, the hard drive on my two-month-old computer crashed. I had planned to use that afternoon to complete some time-sensitive projects. Instead, I spent two hours on the phone with a technician trying to diagnose my computer's failure, and then the rest of day working with a staff member to switch my files over to the laptop of a co-worker who had graciously loaned me his for my long trip.

As you can imagine, I was deeply disappointed that a brand-new computer would fail so abruptly, frustrated that I had to spend so much critical time on unexpected tasks, irritated that I would not have my own computer with me on the trip, and depressed at the thought of how much time I would have to spend tweaking my repaired computer's programs and files back to where I had them set before the crash. I was not in a pleasant mood, and I was very unhappy with the computer vendor. If you had seen my face, you would have seen a dark countenance. If you had heard my voice, you would have heard an uncharacteristic hardness.

All that changed when Avon, a computer technician, apologized for the crash of my computer. Even though he had no direct personal responsibility for what had happened, once we concluded that the hard drive was beyond repair, he began to apologize as though he was personally responsible for my loss and inconvenience. He acknowledged how frustrating it must be to pay for a new computer and then see it crash within two months. He mentioned his own frustration when his computer died, and he acknowledged that even after they sent me the new hard drive, it would take quite a bit of my time to reprogram everything the way it was before.

He apologized so profusely that my ill will toward the company was washed away, and I found myself comforting and reassuring Avon. ("Hey, it wasn't your fault ... hard drives just crash sometimes ... it's really pretty surprising they don't crash more often ... you've just given me two hours of your time trying to help me ... thank you! I really appreciate your help and concern.") After Avon had arranged for a new hard drive to be sent to me, he apologized once again, and asked if there was anything else he could do to serve me or ease the inconvenience of my loss. I reassured him again of my appreciation for his help, and when we said goodbye, I felt nothing but appreciation for Avon and respect for the company he represented.

I had a similar experience a few years ago when I took my family to Disney World. On the last day of our visit, my children's autograph books

(containing the signatures of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, etc.) were lost when someone accidentally switched carts with us outside one of the rides. Even though it was entirely our fault for leaving the books in the bag on the cart (in spite of the large lettered warning not to do so), the young staff member who noticed our plight acted as if it was her fault. She apologized for our loss, sent five co-workers fanning out to search for the lost books, and then gave us new autograph books and special passes to go to the head of the line to get as many autographs as we could before we left the park. A few minutes later, one of the other workers came running up with the lost books, and the team celebrated as though we'd found a lost puppy. I was so impressed by their response to our loss that, years later, I am still singing Disney's praises.

The lesson is obvious for us as Christians: never miss an opportunity to apologize, sincerely and earnestly, to anyone (family members, friends, customers, clients, or fellow employees) who is even remotely disappointed or disadvantaged by something you have done or failed to do—even if you think that the other person carries more blame for their inconvenience than you do. This should be especially true if you have in any way failed to fulfill a responsibility or reasonable expectation. When in doubt, take a few minutes to reinforce the initial apology and ask if there is anything more you can do to make it up for the loss or inconvenience. By sincerely "getting the log out of your own eye," particularly in those stressful relationships around the holidays, you will be able to keep conflicts from unnecessarily spiraling out of control. Remember, as Proverbs 15:1 tells us, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

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### **Christmas Peace**

Peace is a common theme at Christmas time—it shows up in signs, greetings, cards, and carols. Everywhere you turn, people seem to be seeking peace. One particularly meaningful phrase is found in the classic carol, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!* In the first verse, we sing, "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled." What a statement of the essence of biblical peacemaking! Here is our hope for peace. Here is our hope for reconciliation. Christ was born that we might have peace, first with God, and then with one another. Glory to the newborn King!

May you know the joy of reconciliation this Christmas and throughout the new year, with blessings from all of us at Peacemaker Ministries.