

Ten Tips for Making Reconciliation Part of Real Life

*"Behold how good it is, and how pleasant,
Where brethren dwell as one! ...
For there the Lord has pronounced his blessing,
Life forever" (Psalm 133:1, 3)*

Reconciliation and forgiveness are gifts of God—grace (God's presence) working in our lives. How do we get the grace of reconciliation? How do we keep it? Here are ten tips in answer to these questions.

- 1. Pray.** Mother Teresa was once asked to share her hopes for the world. She said, "We must bring that presence of God into our families. And how do we do that? By prayer." Pray everyday for forgiveness of sin. Pray for those whom you have hurt, and for those who have hurt you. Forgiveness doesn't seem to come naturally to most of us. Yet with God's help we will have the grace to forgive and be forgiven.
- 2. Talk.** When we are angry and hurt, we tend to say (or yell!) things that hurt others. When we are caught in the heat of anger, it is usually best to say nothing. But when the anger has subsided, it is really important to *talk* and open the lines of communication again. Nothing cuts off reconciliation as quickly as refusing to talk to someone who has hurt us.
- 3. Be positive.** Bear the good things in mind when the bad comes along: the sweet smile of your child in the midst of a temper tantrum, the generosity of your spouse in the middle of an argument. Take a double exposure of each situation—the good that you know with the bad that will soon pass.
- 4. Be generous.** Give the other person the benefit of the doubt. Before jumping to conclusions, take time to listen and size up the situation. Don't judge. Be willing to forgive as Jesus does, seventy times seven—or more.
- 5. Be compassionate.** See if there is more than one side to the issue. Looking at the situation from the other person's viewpoint might help you understand what is causing the problem, and point the way to a solution. There is an old saying: "to understand all is to forgive all."
- 6. Say the words.** The words "*I love you,*" "*I'm sorry,*" "*I forgive you,*" and "*Will you forgive me?*" should be used liberally in the Christian home. They establish a prevailing atmosphere of forgiveness. This means that when angry storms rattle the rafters (and they will), they will never seriously threaten the undercurrent of unity, love and peace.

7. Make it right. Sometimes this means making the first move toward reconciliation. Be willing to say that you are wrong. Offer a hug, or do something nice for the person you have hurt to show that you are sorry. Allow God's healing presence to work in you. Forgiveness heals us and sets us free.

8. Let go of guilt. All of us can look back on our lives and pinpoint the things we deeply regret, things we wish we could undo. We can berate ourselves for these past failures, or we can forgive ourselves. We set up high ideals built on "shoulds" and "coulds," then feel guilty when we fall short. Again, we need to give ourselves some slack, admit that we are human, and accept our limitations.

9. Forget. "Forgiveness ought to be like a canceled note, torn in two and burned up, so that it can never be shown against the man" (Henry Ward Beecher). Forgetting means we don't rehash the argument over and over, or tell everyone about the wrong that was done to us. Old problems should not be brought out and mixed in with the new ones. Seeking revenge or holding grudges only feeds the hurt.

10. Celebrate. Thank God for the love that exists in your family, love that far outweighs the misunderstandings and problems. Thank God for the many times—through his grace—you have been able to let go of anger and hostility. Thank God, too, for the healing that has come to you through the forgiveness of others. Celebrate the cleansing mercy of peace of Christ in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.