

## Get Over It! | Dori Harrell

How to avoid being easily offended by others' actions or remarks

"I can tell you don't dust your furniture as often as you should," a friend told me recently.

A few years ago, I probably would have severed our friendship over that comment. But despite the immediate urge to usher her out of my house—and my life—I smiled, shrugged, and said, "You're right. I didn't get around to dusting this week; I've been busy."

I call this response my "hold-your-peace" attitude. *Why bother taking offense?* I ask myself. *Is this incident truly significant in my life?* Generally, the insult doesn't merit becoming offended. *Move on*, I tell myself. *Change subjects. Relax and get over it.*

Moving from easily to rarely offended wasn't easy. I needed plenty of practice—and the realization getting over it isn't about forgiving the offender, but about not being offended in the first place.

### Biting My Tongue

Like many people's, my life often revolved around offenses. I know a couple who departed my church after 15 years of attendance because they couldn't bear to worship in the same facility as their offender. I have friends who spent years estranged from loved ones over small offenses. And I, too, have been tempted to make life-altering decisions based on others' thoughtless remarks and actions.

Then, three years ago, I encountered this verse during daily devotions: "He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor, But a man of understanding holds his peace" (Proverbs 11:12, NKJV). That verse nagged me; I knew I didn't require much provocation to start despising my "neighbor."

Just because I'd memorized a handy Bible verse, I still didn't immediately respond with a smile to an offense.

Not long after discovering that Proverb, I quickly found that just because I'd memorized a handy Bible verse, I still didn't immediately respond with a smile to an offense. When I failed to receive a part in a church play, I wanted to march up to Dorothy, the director, and give her a piece of my mind (not exactly the kind of "peace" envisioned in the verse). I knew that as a former high-school actress, I could perform far better than many of the chosen participants.

Yet the words of the Proverb tugged at my heart: *Hold your peace. Just don't react. This incident won't affect your life.* My desire to complain to Dorothy about how she'd slighted me debated that logic. But finally I judged the verse the winner. I promised God I'd actually keep my mouth shut and truly let the offense go. Later, when I unexpectedly received an invitation to be the understudy for the lead role, I praised God for keeping me from spoiling my relationship with Dorothy.

From that close call, I learned, when confronted, to treat each word of the policy as an individual sentence: Hold—*Don't say what's on the tip of your tongue*; Your—*Apply this command to yourself*; Peace—*Ask if this incident will really hurt you.*

### Proposing My Piece

Blessed by the positive changes in my life from consistently practicing this sentence, I decided to share my peace policy with others. So when LeAnn, a close friend from church, confided her struggles with handling an offense, I gladly listened. LeAnn had stepped down temporarily from writing the church's bulletin. Working full time consumed her weekdays; the bulletin consumed her Saturdays, taking time away from her husband, two teenagers, and preschooler.

But then the substitute bulletin writer removed LeAnn's in-basket from the church office. LeAnn felt wounded, cast aside as a volunteer worker. She said she planned to have a little "talk" with her substitute.

Fearing that talk's potential to rupture her friendship with the woman, I finally said, "Have you thought about just holding your peace in this situation? When you're ready to do the bulletin again, you'll likely receive a warm welcome. And if you need an in-basket again, you'll probably get one."

What a look LeAnn shot me! My shoulders tensed as I anticipated a torrent of offending words directed my way. I primed myself to hold my peace with her. But as I waited, I sensed a skirmish within her. Finally, LeAnn promised she'd consider the policy. And she hasn't spoken of the incident since, except to say she's let it go and isn't bothered anymore.

After my chat with LeAnn, I started promoting the peace principle to my four teenage children, and recently watched it at work. A friend of my 14-year-old daughter, Katie, neglected to pick her up as planned for a church event. Katie felt snubbed. And I knew from past experience her first instinct would be to rant and rave.

But Katie merely sighed and said, "I know, Mom, I need to hold my peace. The next time I see my friend, I'll try not to act as if this situation were the end of the world." While my daughter found it difficult to practice this principle, how much more difficult it would have been to deal with built-up bitterness toward her friend.

### **Watching My Words**

The hold-your-peace principle has done more than keep me from building up bitterness or overreacting to offenses. It's taught me that taking offense and confronting a friend or relative are necessary at certain times. During my family's visit to a close, non-Christian relative, he offered my teenage son, Jordan, a taste of wine, even though this relative knew my family's strict no-alcohol rule. That day, I was offended.

I didn't hold my peace, even at the risk of creating tension. I stood and said, "I can't believe you offered Jordan a drink. Please don't ever offer alcohol to my kids." Then I added, "Maybe we should leave." My relative couldn't understand the reason for my anger and hasty departure. We took a while to mend fences, but he won't again suggest my kids "try" some wine.

While I'm now better able to discern when to speak my piece and when to bite my tongue, this hold-your-peace attitude also makes me more aware of my words and actions, thereby keeping me from offending others. When my family and I volunteered to clean the home of our friends Bruce and Melissa after Bruce's crippling motorcycle accident, I surveyed their house with horror. Dust covered the hardwood floors, dishes filled the sink, and a dark, gooey substance coated the stove.

"Don't worry; we'll clean up this terrible mess," I almost responded to Melissa's expressed gratitude. But I stopped myself, realizing I might offend her with those condescending words. Instead, I held my peace for a moment, then said, "Please don't thank us. Thank you for letting us help."

Adopting the hold-your-peace policy has helped me preserve relationships such as this one. And my new attitude has also strengthened my relationship with God. Because I now harbor less bitterness, I'm more open to his Word than I was before encountering that life-changing verse in Proverbs.

I've taken a long time learning how best to serve God, others, and myself through my words and deeds. After all, refusing to be easily offended doesn't come naturally. But as I continue to let go of each consecutive offense, I find it easier and easier to "get over it."