

THE STRAY DOG

A stray dog moved into the Smiths' neighborhood the same day the Joneses moved in next door, and the dog immediately began to wreak havoc, scrounging in trashcans and tearing up flowerbeds in both yards. The Smiths were irked that the Joneses had brought such a nuisance into the neighborhood, and the Joneses found it inexcusable that the Smiths made no attempt to control their dog.



For several weeks neither couple said anything to the other, while bad feelings festered on both sides. Finally Ms. Smith could stand no more and gave Ms. Jones a piece of her mind. "Oh," Ms. Jones replied, "we thought it was *your* dog!"

Often the things that sour relationships are like that dog—more a matter of misunderstandings or small irritations that get blown out of proportion than actual wrongdoing on anyone's part. Usually all it takes to set things right is better communication, but someone has to make the first move, and that's not always easy.



Where can we find the humility to admit we've been in the wrong, or the love and grace to forgive and forget when we've been wronged? Where can we find the wisdom to turn a no-win situation into a win-win situation, the strength to buck our stubborn nature, or the courage to make the first move? All these and more are at our disposal anytime, whatever we need, when we need it, in unlimited supply, free of charge. "Every good and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17 NIV). "Ask, and it will be given you" (Matthew 7:7). Like all of the other best things in life, the most successful relationships begin with the ultimate relationship—heart to heart communion with "the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17).



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