

# Soft Answers

By Linda G. Paulsen  
(Based on a true story)

*A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger* (Proverbs 15:1).

Jacob slipped in the cold slush on the entry floor. “Hold still, Annie!” he shouted.

He squatted next to the big dog and reached for her front paw. He held a towel in his other hand. Annie whined and jerked her paw away when Jacob touched it. She shook herself and nearly knocked Jacob over. He grabbed at her collar and shouted, “Annie! Hold still!”

Jacob let Annie go and wiped up the puddles with the towel. It was his responsibility to clean Annie’s paws when she came in the house, but it was frustrating. Annie didn’t like having her paws cleaned. Jacob sighed. He loved Annie, but she was a lot of work.

So was school. Mrs. Randall assigned a lot of homework, and Jacob didn’t think she was fair. Yesterday, Jacob went to school with his homework unfinished.

“But I already know how to do it, Mrs. Randall,” Jacob said. “I don’t see why I should have to do 20 problems to prove it!”

Mrs. Randall frowned. “I require 20 problems, Jacob. No arguments.” She marked his check-off sheet “Incomplete.”

It seemed that every week Jacob had a problem with

Mrs. Randall. Jacob couldn’t wait until Christmas break.

Things were getting worse with Annie too. Whenever Jacob tried to wipe Annie’s feet, she nipped at his fingers.

“No!” Jacob would shout.

By Christmas Eve, Jacob’s fingers were seriously sore. There were little nip marks all over them. Annie didn’t bite hard, but her teeth were sharp.

“Ouch!” Jacob shouted as Annie bit him once again.

“Stop it, Annie!”

“Why are you shouting at your dog, Jacob?” Grandma asked. She had been watching from the sofa as Jacob wiped Annie’s paws.

“She chews my fingers,” Jacob explained.

“Well, shouting won’t help,” Grandma said.

“People and dogs are alike that way.”

For some reason, a picture of Mrs. Randall came into Jacob’s head. Could he be speaking to her the wrong way too?

“The scriptures say, ‘A soft answer turneth away wrath,’” Grandma said. Then she got up from the sofa and went to the kitchen.

Jacob was thoughtful as he went to the kitchen for dinner. “Grandma, what’s wrath?” he asked.

“Wrath is anger or wanting to punish,” she said.

Jacob thought about that. Maybe he hadn’t tried everything with Annie.

Before bed, Jacob had to mop Annie’s feet for the last time of the night. Instead of shouting and



# Muddy Paws

scolding, he tried to speak quietly. He talked to her about Christmas. He called Annie a good dog and told her he loved her. He politely asked her to stop biting his fingers. Annie had been whining and nipping at his hands, but as he got to her last paw, she stopped. Jacob kept talking, kindly and softly. Annie twitched a little as he finished toweling between her toes, but she didn't bite.

Jacob could hardly wait to tell Grandma. He knew the "soft answer" was the right answer. He knew it would help Annie to stop nipping at his fingers. Jacob felt good inside. The Holy Ghost was testifying to him that he had learned a true principle.

As Jacob got ready for bed, he thought about Mrs. Randall. He knew he needed to work hard on his assignments and be responsible for his schoolwork. He also knew that he needed to speak more respectfully. Could a soft answer turn away some of Mrs. Randall's frustration with him?

"There's only one way to find out," Jacob thought.

He was excited to try. ♦

