

LOVING LIKE A PARENT

Scriptures: Matthew 5:38-48, Luke 15:25-32

In 1982 the Academy award for best picture went to a movie about Mohandas Gandhi, played by Ben Kingsley. Early in the movie Gandhi leads a struggle for human rights in behalf of Indians and other people of color living in South Africa. This is back when Gandhi was young and still had a lot of hair. He meets a white clergyman named Charlie Andrews who wants to help. What follows is a scene where Gandhi, the Hindu, quotes Jesus to Charlie Andrews the Christian minister. Take a look.

(Watch scene from *Gandhi* 1716 to 1944)

“If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Did Jesus really mean that? And when he says, “If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well,” is he serious?

I think the tendency for most of us is to argue with this scripture. We say, “Where would we be if everyone in the world had turned the other cheek to Hitler? Where would our economy be if banks lent money to people without expecting them to pay it back? Where would our justice system be if every time people brought suit we simply gave them whatever they wanted?”

This is why many people dismiss Jesus words here as “metaphorical” or just plain unrealistic. But I don’t think Jesus is being metaphorical in this scripture; I think he is being *illustrative*. He is giving us examples of a new way of looking at people.

The key to this scripture passage is in verses 44-45. Jesus says,

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

The key to this scripture is to look at other people the way a parent would look at his or her own child. Think about that. Loving those who do not always love you, helping someone from whom you don’t expect to get anything back—isn’t that a description of parenting?

I read recently that U. S. Department of Agriculture estimates the cost of raising a child from birth through age 18, not counting child birth or college, is now \$291,570. You know we are never going to get that back. We don’t raise children from a cost benefit analysis. We raise them because we love them, just as God does us, and that is what Jesus is talking about in this scripture passage—learning to look at people as if they were your children, because that is how God looks at them.

To me the most disturbing misuse of this scripture is in situations of domestic violence. A battered wife or child should never ... NEVER ... be told by their pastor simply to turn the other cheek.

But we would not say such a thing even if it were our own child that was doing the battering. If my son or daughter were the abuser in a domestic violence situation, I would do,

and I would want their spouse to do, whatever it took to stop that abuse from happening, even if that included filing charges.

Jesus is not opposed to accountability. Jesus is not against stopping people from doing bad things, any more than we would be opposed to someone stopping our own children from doing bad things. But the key is in how we look at them. Do we see them as an enemy we want to punish or a wayward child that we want to straighten out? Do we see them as freeloaders who ought to be left to starve, or as our own children who may have acted irresponsibly but for whom we would do anything to help them get back on track?

Let me picture a situation. Suppose you wake up at night and hear a burglar in your house. Obviously that is a frightening situation, and your mind rushes to several options. You might think about getting up and going down the stairs with a baseball bat or a gun. Or you might consider locking yourself and your family in the bathroom and calling the police. Or you might think about getting up on a chair and pushing the test button on a smoke detector setting off a shrill alarm that echoes through the house. That has always been my idea. Think about that situation and then ask yourself, "What would I want the homeowner to do if the burglar were my own child?" If your own child were guilty of such a thing, I think you would want them stopped. It would be painful, but you might even be glad to see your child arrested. At least then he or she would be forced to face the consequences of what they have been doing and maybe get some help. But I doubt, I seriously doubt, that you would want the homeowner to go down the stairs and start shooting and ask questions later.

Do you see what I mean? This scripture passage does not mean we should get rid of the police or the courts. But it does mean we should change the way we look at people, even the people who hurt us. Can your own children hurt you? Of course they can. But do we respond to them differently because they are our children? Of course we do. We saw that in the parable of the prodigal son. The father responds differently to the prodigal son than his brother does. Why? Because he's his father. And that is what Jesus wants us to think about. Even though that other person who is hurting you or taking advantage of you is not your child, he or she is God's child, and that makes all the difference.

Back to the movie *Gandhi*. If you know the story, Gandhi eventually led the people of India in a colossal struggle for independence from Great Britain using only non-violent resistance. But then he runs into an even bigger problem. Having gotten rid of the British can Hindus and Muslims get along with each other? Deeply disturbed by the violence that his countrymen are now committing against each other, Gandhi goes on a fast, determined not to eat until the violence stops, even if it means his own death.

In this scene near the end of the movie, a young angry Hindu militant who has been fighting the Muslims comes to Gandhi, who lies on a cot seriously weakened by his fast. Here is what happens.

(Watch scene from *Gandhi* 25445 to 25633)

The key to Jesus' teaching is to see the enemy as your own child, because quite frankly, that is how God sees them.

- Ken Onstot
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