



Loving Bin Laden

What does Jesus expect us to do?

CARL MEDEARIS

“DO YOU MIND IF WE BLINDFOLD YOU?” the Hezbollah fighter asked nonchalantly. “If I have a choice, I’d prefer not, but I’m guessing it’s your call,” I replied with a (nervous) smile. For some reason, they simply chose to make me change cars (all black Mercedes) several times on the way to meet with the #2 man in the Lebanese Shi’ite organization.

My two Lebanese Muslim friends and I waited in the hallway of the dark building for about five minutes before someone walked through the door and said “Follow me.” We did, and found ourselves in a room adorned with yellow-and-black Hezbollah flags and big, soft armchairs. And we waited.

It was at this moment when it hit me what we were doing. We were meeting with an enemy of my country. Probably illegal – I think I had forgotten to check that little detail. (I’m not much for details.) We were surrounded by men with AK-47 machine guns, in an unfamiliar city, in an unknown building, meeting a man I’d never seen, who didn’t know why I was there. Other than that – all was good.

But as soon as our host walked in, I remembered why I was there. He broke into a huge smile as he clasped my hand with both of his and said, “Ahlan

WaSahlan” (Welcome). “I’ve heard so much about you,” he continued. Hmmm? “Heard what, exactly?” I wondered.

It never became clear why he agreed to meet me. Curiosity? To let the West know that the Hezbollah aren’t such bad guys after all? To win me to his point of view – either to Islam or his politics? Not sure. But I decided then and there that I didn’t care and really couldn’t care – otherwise I wouldn’t have come. I knew why I was there: to visibly share the love of Christ with an enemy.

But was he actually my enemy? Did he personally want to harm me? I doubt it. Yet by most definitions he was the enemy of my people, Americans. Maybe even the enemy of Christians. And for sure the enemy of the Israelis. But how could I follow the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth to love my enemies if I never met any? So here I was, on a quest to follow Christ. It wasn’t about doing something with or to Muslims. It was about following Jesus.

That day a friendship began. It was a cautious friendship – on both sides. We were equally skeptical of the other’s agenda. But over the years we have become friends. He’s still a Muslim, still the leader of the Hezbollah in all of south Lebanon, still at war with Israel. But he has now received prayer a

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thousand times, often by the laying on of hands by my Christian pastor friends I take to see him. He has now read the New Testament. We talk often and deeply about the gospel, about big international issues, about the small hidden things of our hearts. He is my friend!

Since the release of *Tea with Hezbollah: Sitting at the Enemies' Table*, the most common question posed to me goes like this: "Yeah, I know that Jesus said to love our enemies, but... I mean, you're not suggesting that... well, you know, we should, like, love Osama bin Laden, are you?"

It's one thing to ask Western Christians to follow Jesus and point out that one of the things he clearly said, and taught, was to love our enemies. It's another thing altogether to make that teaching specific with an actual enemy. Like Bin Laden.

The question is a good one: what do we do with our actual, physical enemies (rather than our theoretical enemies), people who might want to kill us if they had the chance? We're not talking about an ideology or a religion, but a real person, like Bin Laden. What do we do with Bin Laden?

I believe that this topic is critical for our age. I doubt that we ("Christians") have more enemies now than at other times in history, but because of the "flatness" of a globalized world, we simply know about our enemies more than ever before. We see them on the news every day. We are reminded of them several times a day through various sources. So if there was ever an opportunity to fear the enemy, it's now.

Most Christians are left with only two choices, both political: the more "conservative" route of building a strong military case against our enemies, or the more "liberal" route of favoring diplomacy. (Both are generalizations, of course). But isn't there a third way that's actually more powerful, more pragmatic and therefore more effective? How about the way of Jesus? It's not passive, not wimpy, but instead an incredibly compelling method that moves beyond mere dialogue to actual solutions.

But because politicians, and believers of all stripes, don't think this way of Jesus is very useful, it's simply ignored. One of the most interesting aspects of the trip that Ted Dekker and I took was our question to the leaders of the Hezbollah, to Hamas,

So here I was, on a quest to follow Christ. It wasn't about doing something with or to Muslims. It was about following Jesus.

There are three biblical ideas that can help us think clearly about how to treat an actual, literal enemy.

- Joshua 5:13-14 is the story of the angel who appears to Joshua right before he takes Jericho. Whose side is the angel on? Neither. He is the Commander of the Lord's army. Understanding that God is on His own side is a great place to start when we think about our enemies. God is neither "for" or "against" America. He is hoping we are on His side, but He's not on ours.
- In Luke 6:35 Jesus states, "Love your enemies and do good to them." Pretty clear. The idea of "doing good" to our enemies is a powerful one. It really "works" to do good to our enemies – as a strategy for overcoming their agenda.
- In Romans 12:21 the apostle Paul says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." This is a rarely-followed biblical truth – to overcome evil by doing good to the one who is evil. We more naturally think of *running* from evil – a good strategy at times – but not necessarily fighting evil with the frontal assault of goodness!

and to the Bin Laden brothers – what was Jesus' most famous teaching? Most of them said, "To love your enemies." We'd then ask the "Dr. Phil" question, "So how's that goin' for ya?" To which they'd respond, "Not very well because it's not practical." I assured them that unfortunately most of my American friends thought the same.

So basically, few of us really believe that "doing good to our enemies" is actually a strategy to "win." But Jesus did.

Before I get into some specific suggestions for loving our enemies, let me share the three most common objections I get to this idea:

- 1) "It sounds like pacifism, and I believe in the Just War theory." But I'm not speaking politically. So that argument simply becomes an excuse to not personally follow a direct command of Christ. What the government has to do in order to keep its citizens safe is a great discussion – just not this one.
- 2) "It doesn't take into account that there is real evil in this world and that some Muslims are, in fact, engaging in a Jihad of

terrorism against the West.” While I agree that some Muslims have and will engage in clear and horrific acts of terror, it doesn’t follow that we should therefore stop loving our enemies. In fact, this may be the best argument for loving them. Could it be that this is our best, and possibly only, weapon against potential future terrorists? Could it be that if they personally experience the love of Jesus from one of His followers, they would not engage in such activity? Very possibly. I am not naïve. Several times my family and I have been the focus of violent actions by those who bear the label “Muslim.” Evil is real, and it has a root – our one and only Enemy with whom we cannot reconcile – the Devil.

- 3) “*Love doesn’t always work against such people.*” If we’re using “love” as a strategy to “get them”, then it won’t work. But if we love our enemies because God does, and if our hearts are soft towards them because we see God weeping over them, the effect is direct and powerful.



Love is by far the most powerful and forceful weapon we have at our disposal. It is not wimpy. It’s not naïve. It led to the most violent, non-passive, act in history – the Cross. Love does not roll over and lay down. Love conquers all.

So, if you’re still with me, *here are three steps for employing this strategy of Jesus:*

- 1) Take time to think about who your actual enemies are. It could include an in-law, a physical neighbor, even an enemy of the State – the Bin Laden variety. Then engage that person emotionally and spiritually. In other words, force yourself to think about him or her. Imagine what his or her life is like. Why is he the way he is? Now pray for him. Allow God to begin to place compassion and insight into your heart for that person, and to give you perspective. This is critical if you are going to make it to step two. And, by the way, this first step takes a ton of spiritual maturity on our part. Because, if someone is your enemy, you don’t want to do this. But do it anyway!
- 2) Begin to ask God for a plan, for a specific strategy for meeting this person and talking to him or her. I didn’t show up at the Hezbollah leader’s office without first taking a lot of time to think, pray and plan how I would do that

A Unique Solution to Evil in the World

VINCENT J. DONOVAN

The following is excerpted, by permission, from *Christianity Rediscovered*, by Vincent J. Donovan (Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2004, pp. 125-126).

If we take seriously the words and life of the man from Galilee, we are driven to the conclusion that his was a unique solution to evil in the world, a different kind of solution altogether, an unacceptable solution by any political standards: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you.” Jesus spoke without fear against hypocrisy and injustice and corruption into the very teeth of his enemies. His fervor led him to peaks of anger as he physically scattered the men and beasts and goods which were desecrating the temple and the very notion of religion. But this action of his neither purified

the temple nor renewed the sense of religion nor did it obliterate evil or bring justice to the world. In the final analysis, the message of the New Testament, the message that passes from Jesus to us, is that the only way to overcome evil is to give into it. Overcome it he did, beginning with death which he turned into resurrection.

In his case, he could not have overcome death by violently struggling against it, or by disputing with Pilate or Caiaphas over the injustice of it all, and thus avoiding it altogether. It can be argued that his was a singular case, and a singular solution, and that it is not applicable to others, and to us. Singular

and what I would say once I was there. If you don't plan for this, it won't happen. So make it real. Make it practical. I am currently planning to meet some other high-profile enemies so that I can continue my quest of obeying Jesus in everything. And I pray that I will have the courage and the words to say what God gives me to say when the time comes.

- 3) Go. Across the street. Around the world. But you have to go. It's not rocket science for a reader like you. I'm guessing you've traveled before. You've been in cross-cultural situations and gone out of your comfort zone. This is simply one step further. You're now going to meet an actual enemy.

Think about it. What's the worse thing that could happen to you? "I could be killed," you say. But you're going to die anyway, so seriously, what's the worst thing? I think the worst thing is this – you fly halfway around the world to meet "Mr. Bad Guy," and you show up at his doorstep, and he isn't there to meet you. In that case, you wander around a bit and come back the next day. If he never shows up, you've had a good time of prayer and maybe have made some new, unexpected friends. Not so bad, really!

Oh, and by the way, the last time I was having tea with the Hezbollah, here's what I said: "Have you ever thought about employing the strategy of Jesus

in relation to Israel? It's simple, has immediate impact and can be done unilaterally. You can do it right now, all by yourself. You can forgive them. Love them. Start doing good things to them. Bless them. Pray for them. It will annoy and confuse them as much as anything else you've ever done. What do you think?"

The Hezbollah leader's reply? "Carl, Carl, Carl. I know this is the way of Jesus, but it won't work with them. They will simply abuse this kind of niceness, and then where will we be?"

Undeterred, I asked, "So how is your current strategy working? I mean, what do you have to lose?"

He looked down and said, "You know, I'm not sure I have the courage to do this. It might cost me everything."

"Thank you for your honesty, sir," I said. "It cost Jesus everything, too."

Then we prayed. We gathered around him and prayed. We prayed for wisdom. For courage. For honor. For him to do the right thing, the thing Jesus would do. And, well, who knows? It just might work. Because in this case, the "it" is Jesus! ^f

it was, but it stands nonetheless as the only solution to evil offered in the New Testament.

Even beyond his death, when we think of the other issues that were at stake at the time—the issues of justice and innocence and guilt, the question of the meaning of truth and of earthly and non-earthly kingdoms, the matter of the identity of the Messiah and of the true meaning of religion—we have to ask ourselves: who really triumphed? Jesus or Pilate? Jesus or the High Priest? Jesus or the Roman soldiers? Jesus or the Roman Empire?

There will always be a cross somewhere in the midst of the Christian solution to evil, a cross of the pain involved in not returning blow for blow; a cross of the natural, human bitterness felt in the experiencing of hatred and returning love in its place, of receiving evil and doing good; a cross reflected in the near impossibility

of counting oneself blessed in the midst of persecution, or of hungering and thirsting for justice, or in being merciful and peacemakers in a world which understands neither. Between us and fulfillment, between us and everlasting justice, between us and salvation of this suffering world, there will always stand the paradox of the cross, a cross not for others, but for us. "The Jews are looking for miracles and the pagans for wisdom. And here we are preaching a crucified Christ, to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the pagans madness" (1 Cor. 1: 22-23).

There is, on the one hand, a moral, human, political solution to evil in the world. And there is a Christian solution. The gospel, which contains the latter, will always be compromised by identifying it with the former. ^f