

## **MOVING FROM FEAR TO LOVE: A STUDY IN RESOLVING WE VERSUS THEY DYNAMICS IN RELATIONSHIPS**

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We often hear that the opposite of love is hate, along with the notion that the two emotions are on a linear continuum. This study introduces the possibility that they are not linear but rather stem from the same part of the brain circuitry with a very thin line between. In fact, this study also proposes that underneath hate is fear.

Bryan Post, a nationally known family therapist, who writes and practices about the impact of stress on our behaviors, believes that there are only two PRIMARY emotions, and that all other feelings are secondary to these two. Further, stemming from emotions and feelings are all behaviors. (See chart). Please note that the two primary emotions are love and fear, not love and hate.

When we engage in WE versus THEY thinking/attitudes/behaviors, which Miroslav Volf calls "OTHERING", we are supporting the linear model, which offers fewer opportunities for reconciliation. Volf, a Protestant theologian at Yale University, has become known as the "theologian of the bridge". The focus of his work seeks to establish "faith as a way of life" in which there is consistent dialogue between all groups, conversations which seek to build unity.

Using *Speakpeace*, edited by Charyl Brumbaugh-Cayford, and published by the Brethren Press in 2017, this study will include interactive dialogues about topics and ideas that might tend to be divisive. Each session will discuss 3-4 previously selected readings which will be available the previous week. Each reading has a scriptural reference for further study.

The four sessions will have a weekly theme suggesting four ways to build connection, through speech, spaces, thinking and systems.

read Mark 10:32-34

## Reverse fighting

*They will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again (Mark 10:34).*

Using Violence I to stop Violence II automatically doubles the violence—and is about the poorest excuse for intelligent action that thinking men have ever come up with. But understandably, the reason they always have come up with . . . is that they get into situations where they can't figure out anything else that gives any chance of working at all . . .

But because the suffering servant knows that there *is* a God in the picture, he *always* sees another alternative. The world's way of fighting violence with violence is, shall we say, *counterproductive*, so the servant's method will need to be a "reverse fighting." If he can manage to *absorb* the violence into himself rather than either responding with new violence of his own or hardening himself in a way that deflects the original violence back into the world, he has a means of damping the reaction and winding down the conflict. But of course, if what very likely *might* happen does happen and he gets more violence than he can endure, this ends his effectiveness as a fighter and isn't so good for his health, either. At that point, his method can hardly be said to have worked. . . .

To make the analogy even more crude, the suffering servant is like unto an inflatable punch toy. He takes a terrific beating, and it isn't too difficult to knock him down. But he is so weighted at the bottom (with the mass of God's faithfulness) that he always bobs up again. Evil is stymied because it simply cannot get the usual chain reaction as much as started. It punches itself out against the defenselessness of the servant.

—Vernard Eller

**respond** Where have you experienced "reverse fighting"? How was violence stymied?

**pray** Risen Christ, you have proven an alternative way of reacting to violence. We do not do it alone, but by trusting in your resurrection power.

read Luke 15:1-7

## If no one listens

*This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them (Luke 15:2b).*

As I think about the students who choose hallway fighting and the kids who don't, it is easy to sort them into two main groups: troublemakers and "normal" kids. Those groups can be further broken down into specific cliques, each with its own hierarchy. While it is easy to sort kids into groups, it is more difficult to look through the groups to see individual persons. Until the individual person is seen and known, her needs and struggles remain invisible. Wounds that are invisible fester and can eventually become a defining aspect of a person's life, much like a cancer. These wounds can devour kids from the inside. . . .

Can any one person—can I—make any difference in this society called school in which I spend five days a week?

It's easy to ignore violence, conflict, and "others." I could separate myself entirely from almost any hard situation, caring only about myself. It would be incredibly simple. That is the coping mechanism which many students adopt. But if just one person could start caring about others and actually listen to them, might the barriers between "friends" and "others" start to crumble? Could the barriers between different groups weaken to the point where violence isn't necessary to command respect from others? Could genuine respect for others start to grow?

There is no clear answer to this problem, or to making everyone care about those with whom they have little in common. I can only make one person truly start to listen: that person is me.

. . . [Words] are hard to say and sometimes even harder to listen to, but if no one listens to anyone outside their group, how can we ever progress to building a better world?

—Gabriella Stocksdale

**respond** Think about groups you belong to. Do any have cliques?  
*Help me pay attention to people who are left out of*

read James 1:19-27

## Humble silence

*Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness (James 1:19b-20).*

Dear YK,

You have left me nearly speechless. As I review our verbose confessions, I cannot help but remember one of the most disarming moments during my travels to India last year. At a tea with several Indian religious leaders there arose considerable controversy about religion and ethics. After Muslims and Hindus and Christians and Sikhs had argued for a while about the true interpretations of their various faiths, the eldest in the crowd, a modest Gandhian whose appearance brought the Mahatma himself to mind, spoke words that brought the zealous religionists and their audience to a humorous, humble silence. He simply said, "Friends, let us remember that nonviolence is not talking too much."

And so, my dear friend, lest I further taint my conscience with acts of violence, I will be brief.

—*Mary Jo Bowman*

**respond** Ask someone to tell you more about themselves today. Listen carefully to what they tell you.

**pray** Lead me to a place away from the noises of traffic and people. Let the silence be your word to me, dear God.

read Song of Solomon 8:6-7

## Love is what moves us

*For love is strong as death (Song of Sol. 8:6b).*

What is the role of love in the life of faith? The command to love God stands at the center of faith (Deut. 6:4), and all other commands and teachings are related to this. Just as God's love is steadfast and just, so does God call us to steadfast love and justice in our relationships with others.

Love is not described in Deuteronomy as a feeling as much as it is a practice—a practice that demands all of one's heart, soul, and strength (the mind was assumed as part of the heart in Hebrew thinking). All of life is to be oriented to our love of God and is necessarily related to how we live with others. At the boundary between divine and human faithfulness, love is what moves and empowers us to be God's people.

—*Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm*

**respond** What role does love play in your life? How does love for God and for other people empower you?

**pray** Holy God, work in me so that my love for you is strong and true. Let my love for you move me to love others.

**read** 1 Timothy 6:11-12

## The rules by which we live

*Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.  
Fight the good fight of the faith (1 Tim. 6:11b-12a).*

And is the gospel peace and love!  
Such let our conversation be;  
the serpent blended with the dove,  
wisdom and meek simplicity.

Whene'er the angry passions rise,  
and tempt our thoughts and tongues to strife,  
to Jesus let us lift our eyes,  
bright pattern of the Christian life.

Oh, how benevolent and kind,  
how mild! how ready to forgive!  
Be this the temper of our mind,  
and these the rules by which we live.

—Anne Steele

**respond** How is “the good fight of the faith” similar to, and yet different from, the kind of fight that involves the use of physical force and violence?

**pray** May I lift my eyes to you, Jesus, when I’m tempted to violence. Your example is the pattern of my life.

**read** 1 Peter 3:8-12

## Taking the thief’s place

*Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing (1 Peter 3:9a).*

One night John Herr was awakened in his farm home by the noise of robbers in his smokehouse. He found one thief standing at the door of the smokehouse to receive the hams that were handed to him from a thief on the inside. Although John Herr approached quietly, the thief on the outside was frightened and fled to safety without warning his colleague. The Brethren elder then took the thief’s place at the door in order to receive the hams. The other thief, who could not see him, asked how many they should take. Herr replied that they might as well take them all.

The second thief, now aware that he had been trapped, started to run away but the elder proposed that he take along a ham for his family. The thief refused, but Herr insisted and also reminded him, a neighbor whom he recognized, that if ever he was hungry he should not bother to come at night since he could have what he needed if he would simply ask.

John Herr never revealed the identity of the thieves. When they met him later they could not look him in the eye.

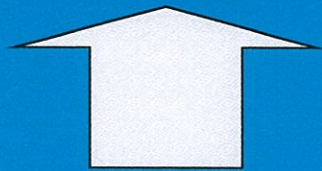
—Kenneth I. Morse

**respond** Let this story inspire you to consider your relationships with neighbors. If there have been problems, how can you repay them with a blessing?

**pray** It is so easy to repay abuse with abuse. But your Son commands me to love enemies and pray for those who would do harm. God, help me on this difficult path!

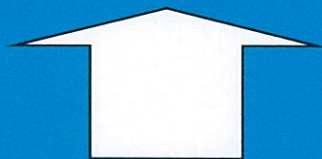
## Fear-Based Behaviors

Lying, stealing, hoarding, gorging,  
aggression, defiance, arguing,  
revenge, screaming, violence



## Fear-Based Feelings

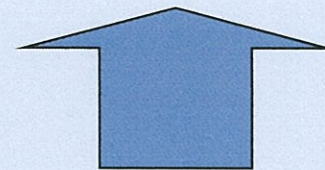
Angry, hostile, hate, shame,  
frustrated, envious, jealous, scared



FEAR

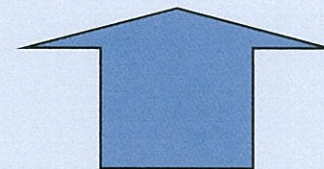
## Love-Based Behaviors

Smiling, conscience, empathy,  
reciprocity, obedience, motivation,  
compliance, helpful



## Love-Based Feelings

Happy, joyful, glad, excited,  
proud, confident



LOVE

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