

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK? HOW *REALISTIC* IS THAT?

All of us, no doubt, have heard the familiar recommendation of Jesus that, when confronted by a caustic or uncaring person, the most *loving* response is to “turn the other cheek.” But even some of the most *dedicated* followers of Jesus have questioned whether doing so would be realistic. They wonder, in what way could such a response be *helpful*? How could turning the other cheek result in a more *constructive* encounter? Indeed, several psychologists have suggested that one’s following Jesus’s advice in a standoff with an abusive person could actually encourage that individual to *continue* engaging in such dysfunctional behavior. After all, it *is* possible, without realizing it, to become an unintentional *enabler* of antisocial behavior.

Of course, Jesus often used metaphor and hyperbole to grab people’s attention or to make an important point, so it is possible that he didn’t intend for us *literally* to turn the other cheek to someone who might be abusing us. But what is clear is that *he definitely was restricting revenge*. Instead of responding violently or explosively to another person’s evil or abuse or, on the other hand, retreating into passivity or indifference, he was counseling us to choose a *non-violent*, even *non-inflammatory* form of resistance. The reason is that retaliation, becoming verbally or physically combative, generally is not a positive way in which to deal with an aggressor. As the wisdom of Jesus points out, to “fight fire with fire” usually *resolves* nothing and actually *increases* the level of animosity. It is for this reason that the New Testament reminds us of a more effective strategy: “A soft answer (a *gentle* response) tends to *diminish* wrath.” That is a *proven* way to make a potentially volatile situation less tense and less difficult.

Is it *possible* that we could become “godly diffusers” of a difficult, anger-filled situation by lovingly turning the other cheek—*especially* by responding to a potentially explosive event with a gentle, *non-threatening* response?

Dr. Mark Goulston, a noted psychiatrist who thinks we can be “godly diffusers,” gives us a thoughtful recommendation: Instead of *defending* ourselves or “hitting back” at someone who has hurt or abused us, it might be helpful to use a technique that might lead to discussion and resolution of whatever led to the confrontation—the opposite of engaging in a highly inflammatory argument.

But how, specifically, might we put Dr. Goulston’s suggestion into practice if we would like to do so? As I have indicated, we need, first of all, to avoid *counter-attacking* the other person. Instead of “putting down” the individual or walking away from the person to demonstrate our disgust, we can do the unexpected, something that no fair-minded person would expect us to do: *offer an apology!*

At first, I thought Dr. Goulston was out of his mind for advocating what seemed to be a totally inappropriate and unfair response when it is *we* who have been hurt. Offer an apology—for *what*? But I decided to give our psychiatrist friend a fair hearing, and I hope you will do so, as well; because I discovered that *his* understanding of that word “apology” made more sense than I initially realized.

Dr. Goulston incorporates the teaching of Jesus into his recommendation. He, as did Jesus, wants us to “turn the other cheek” by giving a gentle response. Here’s an example. Although, at first, it may seem unrealistic, Goulston suggests that we might comment to our abuser, “What you just said helped me to realize that I owe you an apology. I want to apologize for never making the effort to find out how you came to feel the way you do. That was not productive; so I’d like to remedy my oversight right now by asking you to share with me what prompted you to think and feel the way you do. I really do care, and I want to understand your point of view. Could you help me with that, please?” Of course, we need to be sincere about our request, or it could backfire.

If we *follow* Dr. Goulston's advice, the other person probably will be completely disarmed, and his or her anger likely will be diffused; moreover, we will be much more likely to be able to have a helpful discussion of the issue with a greater degree of understanding and maturity than otherwise might have been possible. At the very least, as our psychiatrist friend indicates, we are likely to be able to avoid a debilitating, stressful, emotionally and spiritually exhausting fight that merely *compounds* any existing animosity instead of ameliorating it.

During February, which often is referred to as "love month," perhaps it would be immensely helpful for us to look again at the frequently ignored and seemingly *unrealistic* dictum of Jesus to "turn the other cheek." He just might be pointing us to a marvelously beneficial, yet-to-be-explored way of *deepening* our ability to act lovingly so we can experience what he called a "more abundant life." Could turning the other cheek actually be of *value*? Dr. Goulston helps us to see that it could be a far *more* realistic way of relating than any of us ever imagined!

As you ponder the potential power of Jesus's words on loving more deeply, please remember how much I love and value each of you.

Your pastor and friend,

John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

FEBRUARY, 2017

Sunday, February 12th (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP GATHERING

Probably because Valentine's Day comes each year during February, all 28 days are referred to by some people as "love month." Although Valentine's Day is not considered a religious observance, the experience of loving both God and one another are at the very heart of our Judeo-Christian religion. Consequently, many pastors deliver at least one sermon on the love-reality during February, and our pastor is no exception.

So this Sunday, the subject of love will be a prominent feature of our worship. However, our focus will be quite different than that of just about every other church in the nation. That is because the sermon will break a long-standing taboo—a silent rule, unfortunately observed by virtually *every* minister: *the word "sex" should never be mentioned in the pulpit*. The title of John's sermon will be "Spirituality and Sexuality: Healing the Breach"—a position which may be a bold and daring break with that of most *conventional* religious viewpoints, but not necessarily that of Jesus.

Our usual opportunity for anyone who wishes to engage with our pastor in an informal discussion of the message will follow worship. This should be an exciting, thought-provoking Sunday—and, *perhaps*, an opportunity to grow more closely to the will and purpose of God. (Out by about 12 noon)

Sunday, February 26th (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. DIALOG WITH OUR PASTOR

(This event was postponed last month and rescheduled for today.)

In years past, at the suggestion of one of our members, we scheduled occasional opportunities—usually 3 to 4 a year—for our congregation to “ask the minister” any question about beliefs, an ethical issue, how to apply Christian principles to a particular situation, or any other concern related to living an authentic Christian life. It provided time in a warm, relaxed atmosphere, to ask a question about which you may have wondered *or* something about a life of faith you may not yet understand but never had an opportunity to explore. Or, perhaps you have no pressing question but would be interested in hearing the questions of others and John’s response.

In the past, our vibrant sessions seemed to be deeply appreciated by our members and actually became “a CCM distinctive.” However, as a result of an already full schedule, we did not have *any* of those special opportunities in 2016. So, today we’ll “play catch-up.”

Our pastor’s viewpoint during our engaging, informal talks is that any comment he makes, though based upon rather extensive training and experience, is not the *only* word or the *last* word! It is, as he always puts it, the response of a fallible human being who is dependent upon his understanding of the will and purpose of God at this particular juncture in his *own* spiritual journey, and God may have more wisdom to impart to all of us in the future. But, as always, John will share his response to our questions gladly and will encourage comments from others in the group, as well.

We look forward to this overdue time together and value your questions, comments, listening and reflection.

Welcome to our first “CCM distinctive” in 2017!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

We have three CCMers who will celebrate known birthdays during the month of February: Norma Joy Sessions on 2/4, John Whatley on 2/7, and Tim Werts on 2/26. We wish *each* of these dear people an immensely fulfilling “new year!”

CCM:

**ADDING WONDER, VITALITY AND DEPTH
TO YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY**

***WHEREVER YOU ARE, THE DIFFERENCE
IS WORTH ANY DISTANCE!***