

# JESUS ON BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

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‘When you forgive, you love. And when you love, God’s light shines upon you.’

*Into the Wild, John Krakauer (1996)*

## CHECK IN

At the start of this time together begin by checking in with one another. This can easily take too long so i’m going to get strict with you. Go around the room, you each have 1 minute to say how you are. We are not looking for responses or a conversation rather just presenting yourself to the group as the gift that you are whatever your circumstance. Then once you have all shared pray together. I am in no doubt it will influence your discussions.

## PRAY

Hold a moment of silence to let all your words sink in. Then pray. If someone would like to take a lead then pray for your group, pray for Gods Holy Spirit to be present in your time together and pray for unity that we are here together to learn more about Jesus’s words.

**READ** Matthew 5: 38-48

## STUDY

An eye for an eye is the oldest law in the world. It is know as the *lex talionis*, which means *essentially the law of ‘tit for tat’*. It was part of the civil law of Israel, meant for judges and was not to be taken literally as many crimes were dealt with financial punishments. The law was also designed to be restrictive rather than permissive, preventing blood feuds and injustice from escalating as they often do. In what ways do we still use this law? Is it a good law?

Jesus, like the Old Testament, is forbidding revenge however by the time of Jesus the law had been manipulated, and used to justify personal vendettas, vengeance, malice and hatred. So Jesus goes deeper into what lies behind the law using four illustrations. Turn the other cheek, hand over your cloak, go two miles and to give.

In what ways are these illustrations often misinterpreted to describe a ‘passive’ Christian response? How and in what ways do they change the dynamic between victim and perpetrator? Our usual response to conflict is fight or flight, these might be called non-retaliation or non-violent response that find a new way to address the injustice being committed.

Did Christ in his life and death live out what he taught?

There is a rabbit hole of questions that could be considered in relation to this teaching about when violence may be justifiable. E.g. what about self defence? killing to save another persons life? protecting family? government? police force? military service? Just war theory? Old Testament violence?

To help answer these questions we must consider our motive, our attitude, our prejudices, our anger and ask are we acting out of love? If we are to love we must hold this uneasy tension of using force. We must never allow ourselves to be motivated by revenge or malice. Rather we are to be peaceful, willing, generous and liberal with our time, money and resources. To live differently to the world around us, to be the light and salt of the world requires the courage to forgive and to have the moral imagination to look for a new path to take when seeking justice.

## MEDITATION

‘Learning to meditate is also learning how to live. There’s an old saying from the early church, *lex orandi lex credendi*, the way of praying is the way of living. So the way we pray, we could say, is a powerful influence, deep influence on how we live.’

(Laurence Freeman, Learning how to live, WCCM, 6 May 2023)

To end this session on breaking the cycle of violence let us spend some time in meditation.

If you are able put on this beautiful piece of music by Arvo Part, it is 10 minutes long so get comfortable, close your eyes and ask the Holy Spirit to come. Ask the presence of the Holy Spirit to fill the room and open up your posture, mind and heart to what God wants to reveal to you. Consider when you have been hurt or have hurt others physically, emotionally or spiritually. Bring it to God and ask for help in finding a way forward that will bring light rather than more darkness.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ6Mzvh3XCc>