

A Christian response to conflict

Turn the other cheek

Students should be guided through this role play:



Show me (*don't actually do it*) how you would hit the person next to you on their right cheek

They may be tempted to use the left hand. This is not allowed because when Jesus was speaking the left hand was only used for unclean tasks. It would cause scandal to use the left hand for anything else.

Using the right hand – in order to get maximum purchase - it would have to be with a slap with the back of their hand which, in Jesus' time, was how someone controlled someone of a lower social standing to them (e.g. parent to child, master to servant).

So there is a power relationship in this story Jesus is telling: the powerful one strikes the one with no power in order to control them.

What happens when they turn the other cheek and invite the aggressor to strike them on the left cheek?

There are three possible outcomes:



They use their left hand – we have already shown that the left hand is not permissible.

They use the front of their hand – this is how people of the same social class would have fought so by doing this you have recognised the equality of the person you are hitting.

They use the back of the right hand – very difficult. It is ineffective and you look a bit silly trying.

By causing this problem for the aggressor, you have challenged their actions, made them think about them and pointed them towards a better way. You have neither ignored the injustice nor reacted violently but sought a creative and nonviolent way to deal with it.

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Love your enemies

Rev Julie Nicholson

A Bristol vicar who resigned from her parish because she could not forgive the 7 July bomber who murdered her daughter on the tube. Rev Julie Nicholson said, 'I am looking for a way in which I can still have priestly ministry when there are some things I can no longer practise, or I can't currently practise... and for me that's about integrity. It's very difficult for me to stand behind an altar and celebrate the Eucharist and lead people in words of peace and reconciliation and forgiveness when I feel very far from that myself... so for the time being, for the moment, that wound in me is having to heal.'

After the bombings she had said, 'I really believe that goodness will overcome the present evil we are seeing and we have to hold on to the goodness of humanity'.

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Margaret and Barry Mizen

16 year old Jimmy Mizen from South London was killed in a brutal attack in May 2008. At the time his mother Margaret said 'I just want to say to the parents of this other boy, I want to say I feel so, so sorry for them. I don't feel anger, I feel sorry for the parents. We have so many lovely memories of Jimmy and they will just have such sorrow about their son. I feel for them, I really do...People keep asking me why I am not angry but I say it was anger that killed my son. If I was angry I would be the same as this boy. There is too much anger in the world.'

On the first anniversary of the murder Jimmy's father said, 'today, for us, was a message of peace, a message of change that we have been gradually working towards over the year. If the will in this country is for it, we can change. This affects everybody. If somebody is killed in your local park or in your local shop, then this affects you. We didn't just get here overnight. This problem is the result of 20 or 30 years of the way society has been living, but we can change it.'

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Marie Fatayi-Williams

Marie's son, Anthony, 26, was killed in the 7/7 bus bombing. This is part of her appeal while he was still missing.

'Which cause has been served? Certainly not the cause of God, not the cause of Allah, because God Almighty only gives life and is full of mercy. Anyone who has been misled, or is being misled to believe that by killing innocent people he or she is serving God should think again because it's not true. Terrorism is not the way... We can't deliver peace by terrorism, never can we deliver peace by killing people... It's time to stop and think. We cannot live in fear because we are surrounded by hatred. Look around us today. Anthony is a Nigerian born in London, worked in London, he is a world citizen.

'Here today we have Christians, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, all of us united in love for Anthony. Hatred only begets hatred. It's time to stop this vicious cycle of killing. We must all stand together, for our common humanity.'

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From Martin Luther King Jr's essay, *Loving Your Enemies*

To our most bitter opponents we say: 'We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory.'

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Bishop Pierre-Marie Théas

One evening in 1944, the bishop spoke in his cathedral against the persecution of Jews and deportation of French men as forced labourers. The following night he was arrested by the Gestapo. He was sent to a detention camp at Compiègne from where most prisoners were transported to concentration camps in Germany. Bishop Théas was imprisoned for ten weeks with Protestants, Jews, non-believers, trade unionists, young resistance workers, officers. When some prisoners asked for a day retreat he preached about forgiveness, and suggested they should pray for their captors. This provoked outrage. Théas replied, 'My friends, I cannot proclaim anything except what the Lord said: Love your enemies. No more, no less.'

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Gee Walker

Gee's son Anthony, 18, was murdered with an axe in 2005 by two racist thugs. After they were sentenced she said: 'I cannot hate. I have to forgive them. Hate is what killed Anthony... Their minds must be very tortured.'

To her it is obvious that if she did not forgive, and did not answer racism with tolerance and love, it would insult the memory of Anthony who, like her, lived by the tenets of peace and Christianity