suggests, if they remain part of the status quo—a system relying on dominance, and often lacking in mercy and compassion. This warning against violent fundamentalism still holds true today. We can be the most devout, strident religious person around, yet still not enter the kingdom of heaven. We do not want to be fervently religious and end up hurting others, even supporting war, domination, and empire. The goal is to enter the kingdom of heaven and help others enter as well. We need to reject any trace of violence in our religious practice, belief, spirituality, community, and church. Jesus does not want us to be religious fundamentalists who end up serving the very culture that treats people so brutally. Jesus summons us to a deep humility and the kind of mindset that sets others free, that blesses others rather than condemns them.

"You Have Heard It Said, But I Say to You": The Six Antitheses of Nonviolence (5:21–48)

The six antitheses that follow form the backbone of the Sermon on the Mount. Each one begins with the phrase, "You have heard it said, but I say to you. . . ." In each case, Jesus invokes a core teaching of Judaism, the Torah, and the Hebrew Scriptures, and then proceeds to transform and fulfill it in light of his way of radical love. These six antitheses are not pious platitudes or interesting phrases or friendly suggestions. They are commandments. They make up the new law of God. They are the fulfillment of Moses's Ten Commandments, and as such are meant to be taken as seriously as the Ten Commandments. Actually, they surpass and transcend the Ten Commandments. They are the concrete application of the Beatitudes, and they build up to the climactic fifth teaching against violent retaliation and the sixth teaching, the most revolutionary text in all of human history, the command to end war and love our enemies. They should be set in stone in our churches and our hearts.

With these new teachings, we make the historic transition from "Thou shalt not . . ." to "Thou shalt. . . ." They point to new, positive directions: "You shall love, you shall make peace, you shall be just, you shall forgive, you shall be totally nonviolent, you shall be as compassionate as God." The boundaries of nonviolence are still hard and difficult: no anger, no lust, no divorce, no violent retaliation, no war, no judging others, no condemning others. But what we might miss in the reading is that these boundaries of nonviolence open into the infinite *freedoms* of nonviolence.

Still, for some, the antitheses that follow seem impossible. I'm convinced, however, that Jesus would not have said these things if they were not possible to live. We see them lived out in the lives of the saints. If we make the Beatitudes and these teachings the primary focus of our lives, then they do become possible, doable, achievable, even welcome. For those who get stuck in the words that follow, the best solution is to keep your eyes on the nonviolent Jesus and go forward anyway; you will understand by doing as Jesus says, not by overthinking it. We say the ancient prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner," and get on with the work of discipleship. As we try to live Jesus's teachings and keep working at them one day at a time, we may find ourselves living into them and one day practicing them naturally without even realizing it. Until then, we "fake it till we make it."

First, "Be Reconciled" (5:21–26)

"You have heard it said, 'Thou shalt not kill,'" he begins, "but I say to you, do not even get angry." With this commandment, Jesus throws down the gauntlet and challenges us to go beyond the prohibition of war and killing. He wants us to dig out the roots of violence within us, which find their first expression in our anger, so that we never give in to hatred, violence, killing, or warfare.

Here Jesus instructs us in the emotional life of nonviolence. In the Beatitudes, he recommended that we cultivate two emotions: grief and joy. Now he urges us to avoid anger; later, he will instruct us to avoid fear as well. This is difficult because as people steeped in the culture of violence, we are taught to be angry and afraid.

For Jesus, anger leads to violence. The collective resentment and anger of people, even nations, leads to injustice, discrimination, racism, fascism, and war. Jesus wants us to look within, to find the roots of violence in our anger and resentment, and to surrender them to God every time we notice them. Only when we cease to be angry people can we act as authentic peacemakers.

The tragic history of violence and warfare proves that Jesus was right. Anger doesn't bring peace; it only breeds retaliation. Gandhi was one of the few public figures who cites this text as the reason why he "conserved his anger," in his words. Shortly before he died, he gave an interview in which he said it was the smartest move he ever made. It's easy to be a raging angry activist, he thought. The longer you live and work for justice, he realized, the more injustice you will face, and the angrier you can become. He did not want to spend his life in anger. Further, he presumed that Jesus knew better than he did, that Jesus had found a way to struggle for justice without cultivating anger. Gandhi wanted to be totally nonviolent, which meant going beyond anger into grief, joy, and peace. The greatest saints of justice and peace learned to let go of anger and fear, and taught themselves a new way of living, rooted in nonviolence, mindfulness, compassion, and reconciliation.

Jesus does not want us to waste time in anger. He's trying to form us into practitioners of nonviolence who transcend anger and join his campaign, even unto suffering and death, without any desire for retaliation or revenge, without even a trace of resentment. The public work he's training us for will lead to confrontations, disruptions, betrayals, harassment, persecution, even arrest and execution, as he and the early church experienced. If we are going to face this work in Jesus's spirit, then we have to learn to let everything go, even the putdowns, attacks, humiliations, insults, inconveniences, and hurts that make us angry, and to stay centered in the Holy Spirit of peace. In this training, we will be able to live out the last Beatitude—to rejoice when people insult and attack us because of our Christian witness. We will move way beyond anger into the ongoing practice of forgiveness and compassion that bring deep joy as we focus solely on God's reign.

Jesus was not an angry person. Even when he engaged in civil disobedience in the temple, as we shall see, he was acting not out of anger but out of grief. There are only two references in the four Gospels where it says he was angry: in Mark 3, the healing of the man with the withered hand; and John 11, the raising of Lazarus. But in each case, the actual Greek word denotes something different from anger, a kind of beside-himself, deep-down grief and disturbance. He becomes very upset, but he does not lash out in anger ever. We see this finally during his

arrest, torture, and execution when he does not get angry but remains totally centered in faith in God, and maintains his forgiveness, compassion, and nonviolence to the bitter end.

The great modern peacemakers of history figured out how to work for justice and peace without resorting to anger and instead moving into a deep, mysterious sense of grief, peace, and joy, which allowed them to remain faithful to God's way of nonviolence until the end. We see this most especially in the extraordinary angerlessness of Gandhi and Dr. King. I have seen it up close my entire life in my great friends and teachers—Coretta Scott King, Mairead Maguire, Dom Helder Camara, Rev. Jim Lawson, Daniel Berrigan, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mother Teresa, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, and Thich Nhat Hanh. Each of them moved beyond anger, despite their having suffered the killings of their loved ones, even their own death threats. They were people of deep peace, compassion, and joy, and they encouraged me to pursue the unknown land beyond anger, the promised land of peace. Indeed, Archbishop Tutu, who was under near constant death threat his whole life, was famous for his joy and laughter, and I experienced it firsthand. Daniel Berrigan was one of the funniest people I've ever known, but so was Mother Teresa. It is possible to spend one's life confronting violence, poverty, and war without giving in to anger, despair, and fear. There is another way—a new path that Jesus is trying to teach us, a narrow path of peace beyond our understanding.

In his reference to judgment, Jesus simply explains the nature of things, the karma of violence. Those who live by violence will suffer and die by violence. He warns us not even to insult another person, starting with our brothers, because we will have to face the consequences of our violence. Jesus understands that if we reject anger; let go of hatred, bitterness, and resentment; learn to forgive everyone who ever hurt us; and refuse to retaliate, the roots of violence within us will dry up and we will begin to cultivate new depths of interior nonviolence, what he called "purity of heart" or "cleanliness of heart" in the Beatitudes.

But just when we think we might understand the teaching, there comes the new commandment: "*Be reconciled!*" This first antithesis goes on to say, whenever anger arises in you because of the way you feel you have been mistreated, not only do not respond with anger, hatred, resentment, or violence, but use the occasion to remember the people you have hurt, who hold something against you, and drop whatever you are doing and go "be reconciled" with the ones who are angry at you, the ones you have hurt.

What's even more shocking, Jesus says in effect, "Whatever you do, if someone has something against you, if someone is angry with you because you hurt them, do not go before God to worship God. Do not go to the altar to present your gift to God. Instead, go immediately to those you have hurt, apologize to them, and reconcile with them. Then, once you have reconciled with those you have hurt, bring your gift to the altar and worship God."

This is the new prerequisite for all worship of God. From now on, before we pray, or approach an altar, or worship the God of peace, we apologize to those we have hurt, ask them to forgive us, try to reconcile with everyone and forgive all those who have hurt us. We want to be reconciled with everyone on earth. From this new place of heartfelt humility, repentance, and reconciliation, we can approach the God of peace and reconciliation, and we will be reconciled with God. In the end, this instruction teaches us about the nature of God: God is nonviolent and is therefore always reconciling us with one another and to

God's Self. This should be the work of our lives, too—to constantly reconcile everyone with one another and with God; to become a reconciling, reconciled people. This is the work of the spiritual life; this is the path of peace.

Likewise, with Jesus's last antithesis, he commands us to "settle with our opponents on the way to court," while there is still time, before we foolishly end up in prison. Understand that compromise, forgiveness, reconciliation, and letting go are the tools necessary to protect your peace and help you maintain your nonviolence. Come to your senses, atone, and take action immediately before you suffer the consequences of your mistakes.

Gandhi spent most of his life praying through this first antithesis. He experimented with it with all his opponents, especially the British, and learned to love and make friends with his enemies. He became so disarming that his opponents in South Africa and Britain became his dear friends, including Prime Minister Jan Smuts of South Africa and Lord Mountbatten, the last British viceroy of India. Shortly before she died, Queen Elizabeth II told the current prime minister of India that her most cherished gift was a handkerchief Gandhi sent her on her wedding day. She kept it on her desk till the day she died. Peacemaking and reconciliation are possible, even for the staunchest enemies. This is the kind of total nonviolence Jesus teaches.

Second, Mind Your Heart, Change Your Lives,
Be Totally Nonviolent (5:27 30)

The prohibition on adultery in the second antithesis summons us to have pure, clean, nonviolent hearts like Jesus's. He is calling us to a life free from lust so that we look at and treat every human being on the planet compassionately as a sister or a brother, a child of God.

"You have heard, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'; but I say to you, 'everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'" Here he commands husbands not only to be faithful to their wives, but men not to look at women with lust. As he unpacks the boundaries of nonviolence, he commands every one of us not to give in to lust and never to look at another person with lust ever again. If we begin to look at one another through his eyes of respect and dignity, and learn to find God in one another, we will enter God's reign here and now, and that is always Jesus's goal. In this case, there would be no more sexual harassment, abuse, or violence against women or anyone. The nonviolent feminist Jesus here sides with women, protects women, and in effect, presages the #MeToo movement.

Mind the boundaries of sexuality and dignity, he counsels. Do not objectify others, do not violate others, do not hurt others. Examine your heart, protect your heart, mind your heart. For some people, the warning against lust in our hearts might sound preposterous; for others, it might sound inviting but impossible. But it is possible, otherwise Jesus would not have called us to this inner depth of nonviolence. Millions of people around the world who struggle with lust addiction have found relief through various Twelve Step programs in which members find community support to surrender their lust to God and live out the AA serenity prayer. As a priest who has counseled many people, I have seen people healed of all kinds of addictions, including lust, people who have found a new kind of peace through their sobriety.

For Jesus, this is all urgent life-or-death stuff. He wants us to make our inner transformation toward purity and nonviolence a priority, so that we do whatever we need to do to rid

ourselves of violence, anger, hatred, resentment, lust, fear, and selfishness. To push us into the immediate work of reforming and disarming ourselves, Matthew's Jesus uses violent imagery to wake us up to the urgency of pure nonviolence toward all others, saying, protect your heart at all costs, even if it means suffering the loss of an eye or a hand.

> "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna."

The point here is to do everything we can to stop ourselves from sinning, that is, from hurting others and having to face the consequences of our violence. Jesus solemnly warns us about the consequences of all behavior. What goes around comes around. If you live by violence, you will suffer and die in violence. Gehenna is the hell of total violence, which is here and now for many people, either as oppressors or oppressed, victims or victimizers. Jesus wants us to do everything we can to enter the heaven of total nonviolence right now, which means taking drastic action to stop any behavior that is not the will of the God of peace and love.

As the embodiment of nonviolence, Jesus would never want us to hurt ourselves. But we spend our lives hurting others, participating in the social sin of mass murder (war), oppression, greed, and destruction, so he uses drastic language to wake us to the truth of our participation in the culture of violence, that this "sin" has eternal consequences for our souls. Therefore, he pleads, take urgent, drastic action to change yourself right now so that you never hurt anyone, anywhere ever again; so that you are not complicit in the culture of violence and headed toward the Gehenna of total violence; so that you do not think harm, including lustful thoughts, toward any human being ever again.

This passage is helpful, if we open ourselves to its wisdom and compassion. It expresses Jesus's urgent desire that we change whatever we have to change about ourselves so that we become like him, people of compassion and peace. He wants us to really do our inner work, to seek help if necessary, in order to root out every trace of violence, including anger and lust, so that the God of peace can dwell at peace within us, so that we can reclaim our humanity and live and die in peace with ourselves and others. As we take action to change our behavior, we learn all over again to become people of prayer, who rely on God every day, one day at a time, so that we never hurt anyone or anything and begin to experience the reality of God's reign of peace.

Third, You Men, Treat Women Respectfully as Equals (5:31–32)

In this antithesis on divorce, the nonviolent Jesus takes a stand in defense of women. Here he protects women and insists that women are equal to men, that men can no longer mistreat or disrespect women. This commandment is addressed to men: you must treat women with equality, dignity, respect, and nonviolence. This teaching, too, begins a nonviolent revolution in the sexist culture of violent patriarchy.

A close look reveals that Jesus is defending women who get blamed by men for everything. Men did not consider women to be equals; they were in effect subhuman, the

property of men. If a husband was divorcing his wife, it was because she was to blame. Not anymore, says Jesus. Here, Jesus announces, every husband is equally to blame when it comes to divorce. This was nothing less than revolutionary! No man would say or believe such a thing in Jesus's time. Many men today are still so infected with sexism and patriarchy that they consider women to be less than equal. Jesus teaches here a new depth of nonviolence—that men and women are totally equal, and that men should treat women with total respect, nonviolence, and dignity, and that men should presume in fact that they are to blame because of the legacy of male violence, sexism, and patriarchy. By saying that men are equally to blame in matters of divorce, Jesus elevates women and tears down patriarchy. He points to the coming of a new culture of equality and respect.

This radical equality is at the center of Jesus's thinking and the beginning of feminism. The logic of his feminist nonviolence says, "You men, do not harass women, hurt women, verbally, emotionally, or sexually abuse women; do not rape women, do not be violent in any way to women, and work toward a new society in which all women are treated equally with men." This commandment for equality toward women is the beginning of the end of sexism, patriarchy, and male violence against women. It demands that men reject their tendency to dominate others.

Jesus is clearly against divorce because this teaching appears in other places in the Gospel. Within the wisdom of nonviolence, one presumes he wants marriages that remain faithful, peaceful, and lifelong; that husbands and wives live together in prayer and peace and raise children in a spirit of love and freedom. He does not want us to harm one another, much less to destroy a marriage, which will cause further harm. We can safely presume that he would want husbands and wives today to be doing their inner work, to practice nonviolence, to put the other before themselves, and to create marriages and families where God dwells in their midst in peace.

The so-called exception clause—"unless the marriage is unlawful"—seems to refer to a rare problem that was happening in Matthew's community, where some rabbis permitted marriages of incest, to one's relative. Gentile converts to Judaism who had married their relatives were permitted to maintain their marriages. Here, Matthew's Jesus addresses this question by saying that such marriages were not legal to begin with; Gentile converts to Christianity who had married within the familial bloodline were therefore not legally married.

Fourth, Speak Only Truth; Let Your Yes Be Yes and Your No Be No (5:33–37)

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not take a false oath,' but I say to you, 'Do not swear at all.'" Why does he say this? The purpose of an oath or a swear was to call upon God as a witness to our truthfulness. If you have to profess an oath or even swear to God that you are telling the truth, that indicates that sometimes you lie. For Jesus, thoughtful, loving relationships are rooted and grounded in truth, which means that you never lie. Nonviolence goes hand in hand with truth. In John's Gospel, Jesus will say, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." So Jesus instructs his followers: from now on, speak only the truth. There's no reason to swear to God to prove your truth-telling; you do not need to prove that what you say is true because you always speak the truth, no matter what. And you always speak

the truth with love and compassion. This is a requirement for Christian discipleship and nonviolence.

The teaching is short and to the point: "Let your yes be yes, and your no be no. Anything more is from the evil one." As truth seekers and truth speakers, we speak the truth and only the truth. That means our language can be simple, straightforward, and to the point. We do not need to say anything else. We speak the language of nonviolence, so we speak the truth in love.

In a culture of violence and war, you are required to lie. Lying is the language of violence. You are not allowed to say that every human being on the planet is your sister and brother, that we are all children of the God of peace. Instead, we objectify others, dehumanize people, and turn them into "them," the hated enemy, the "other," the "illegal alien," and so forth. One of the key requirements for a new culture of peace and nonviolence will be a new language of peace and nonviolence rooted in the truth of love and equality. The language of truth is desperately needed today as we descend into greater global violence. Now more than ever, our yes and no are greatly needed. In this Tower-of-Babel culture, from FOX News to social media, people say everything but yes and no. Matthew's Jesus invites us to learn how to speak the language of truth and nonviolence.

Later, when the nonviolent Jesus stands condemned before the Roman procurator, he will say, "All those who seek the truth listen to my voice." If we learn to disarm our language and speak only yes and no, then over time, we will become listeners instead of talkers. We will listen for the words of the nonviolent Jesus, for the truth, for wisdom, for the voice of God. This will eventually bring us to the peace of silence, to the silence of Jesus before the Roman court. In that silence, we deepen into contemplative nonviolence, contemplative peace, and contemplative truth. We enter a wisdom beyond the language of violence and discover the geography and language of peace. This listening and silence will make us ever better instruments of Jesus's peace.

Fifth, "Offer No Violent Resistance to One Who Does Evil" (5:38–42)

Here we reach the climactic fifth and sixth antitheses—the total prohibition of violence, the commandment to non-cooperation with those who do evil:

> "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no [violent] resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow."

These words are pure revolution, for they launch a nonviolent revolution against not only war but violence itself. It is certainly one of the most important passages in the Bible, and in history, for it charts a way out of the downward spiral of violence into peace, justice, and reconciliation. That is why Gandhi read this verse every day for over four decades, why Leo Tolstoy spent the last twenty-five years of his life writing solely about this verse, trying his best to publicize this teaching. These great figures understood that this teaching holds the

key to personal salvation and a more nonviolent world—if we dare to obey it, teach it, promote it, and organize around it.

Previously, the Torah had tried to regulate fair punishment so that the punishment would not exceed the injury. If you think of it that way, "an eye for an eye" marked a progressive step forward in the history of violence. Jesus will have none of it. He forbids all violence, even retaliatory violence in the face of violence, no matter how supposedly fair. He prohibits any form of violent punishment or violent retaliation or revenge. He advocates a new way: creative nonviolent resistance to oppression and violence.

The Greek word here is *antistēnai*, which theologian Walter Wink writes means "to resist violently, to revolt or to rebel with violence" (see Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 184–93). "Offer no '*antistēnai*,'" Jesus commands; that is, do "no violent resistance to one who does evil." Do not use violence to resist evil. Do not continue the downward spiral of violence. Jesus wants us to break the cycle of violence by refusing to cooperate with it or retaliate with further violence. Violence in response to violence will lead to further violence, he teaches. "Do not repay evil for evil." Gandhi put it this way: "An eye for an eye only makes the whole world blind." Relying on Wink, I translate the phrase as "offer no violent resistance."

But just because we do not respond to violence with further violence does not mean we sit back and suffer violence passively. Jesus commands us to be creative, to disarm our opponent through nonviolent means. He does not teach that submission to violence or evil is the will of God; on the contrary, he commands active nonviolent resistance to evil. The culture of violence insists that there are only two options in the face of violence: fight back with violence or run away and do nothing. In *Engaging the Powers*, Walter Wink says Jesus offered "a third way": active nonviolent resistance. Jesus did not advocate passive resignation or indifference to evil or violent retaliation, but something entirely new. He taught and practiced active, steadfast resistance to every form of violence and injustice, with one catch: it must be nonviolent. He insisted that we stand up and resist all violence and injustice, in whatever form, whether at the personal, national, or global level, but we do not use the violent means of our oppressor; instead, we engage in nonviolent resistance so that everyone comes out unscathed. The only way to end the chain of violence is by refusing to become part of it. If you practice nonviolence, even in the face of violence, even through your own suffering love and insistence on truth and our common humanity, you will disarm the situation and literally end the violence.

The fifth antithesis in the Sermon on the Mount is the clearest teaching on nonviolent resistance to evil in all of history up until this point. But it has generally been misinterpreted to mean passivity. Scholars now agree that the text calls for creative, confrontational nonviolent action that disarms the oppressor without using the same means as the oppressor. Jesus wants us to resist evil with active nonviolence—to hold our ground, speak the truth, insist on our common humanity, disarm our opponent, risk suffering love, trust in God, and work for the conversion of our opponent—so that the one who does evil or supports systemic injustice disarms. The goal is not to hurt or kill our opponent but to transform him, to lead him to a change of heart, to win him over to the truth, to convert him to nonviolence, and to help him and others welcome God's reign of love and peace. Wink writes that Jesus's teaching on nonviolence "forms the charter for a way of being in the world that breaks the spiral of violence:"

> Jesus reveals a way to fight evil with all our power without being transformed into the very evil we fight. It is a way—the only way possible—of not becoming what we hate. "Do not counter evil in kind"—this insight is the distilled essence, stated with sublime simplicity, of the experience of those Jews who had, in Jesus' very lifetime, so courageously and effectively practiced nonviolent direct action against Rome. Jesus, in short, abhors both passivity and violence. He articulates, out of the history of his own people's struggles, a way by which evil can be opposed without being mirrored, the oppressors resisted without being emulated, and the enemy neutralized without being destroyed. Those who have lived by Jesus' words—Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez, Adolfo Perez Esquivel—point us to a new way of confronting evil whose potential for personal and social transformation we are only beginning to grasp today. (Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 189)

Like every good teacher, Jesus does not leave us just with the theory. He gives five concrete examples about how to do this. First, "when someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well." Walter Wink was perhaps the first person to ask the obvious question: If you strike someone's face with your right hand, where's it going to land? On their *left* cheek. But Jesus specifically talks here about being struck on the *right* cheek. So what's he talking about? To strike someone on the right cheek would require using the left hand, but the left hand was only used for unclean work; you could be punished for using your left hand. So, the only way to strike someone with your right hand on their right cheek would be to use the back of your right hand. In other words, Jesus is not talking about a fistfight but top-down, violent humiliation, the behavior of a slave owner or Roman soldier toward an oppressed person who is kneeling down, struck with the back of the hand and humiliated. If you are a slave, or a peasant kneeling in front of a Roman soldier, and you turn the other cheek in the face of such humiliation, you would be asserting your dignity, equality, and humanity, and putting yourself on equal footing. You would be saying in effect, "I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you." As Gandhi said, "The first principle of nonviolent action is that of non-cooperation with everything humiliating."

Jesus does not want us to sit back passively and suffer the violence of our oppressors. He wants us to nonviolently resist their injustice, to take nonviolent action for our liberation and theirs. He tells us we are not helpless or powerless. The only problem is that his method is also risky. It means engaging the opponent right then and there, in the face of violence. It's scary, but he says, "Do not be afraid. Turn the other cheek and disarm your opponent." It's equally scary to fight back with violence, and the chances are you will most likely be really hurt or even killed; nonviolent resistance has a higher chance of a peaceful outcome. Furthermore, for Jesus, there is always a third party involved. It's not just the oppressed person and the violent oppressor about to strike, but God. God works through our active, creative nonviolence. If we respond nonviolently, the Holy Spirit of disarming nonviolence will be unleashed and will have a chance to disarm the oppressor. We see modern examples of this in the civil rights movement, when Black activists sat-in illegally at segregated lunch counters, refused to leave, were sometimes beaten, refused to retaliate, and eventually won the day and brought about desegregation.

A second example. "If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well." In that time, the poor were forever in debt. People wore outer and inner garments, but, as Wink writes, they were hauled into court and sued by landlords even for the clothes off their backs. Only the poorest, those Jesus addressed, would have nothing but an outer garment to give as a loan. So, when you find yourself in court and the authorities demand your outer garment as payment for your unjust landlord, he says, give them your inner garment as well. But if a poor person was sued in court for his outer garment and gave away his inner garment, too—what would that mean? He would end up naked in the middle of the courtroom. Now in those days, it was more shameful to see a naked person than to be naked in public, so Jesus is inviting his listeners to bold, creative nonviolent action—to claim their power, shame their oppressors, and liberate themselves without running away or being violent, but confronting the crisis nonviolently head-on. As Wink explains, the poor man has "transcended the attempt to humiliate him. He has risen above shame. At the same time he has registered a stunning protest against the system that created his debt. He has said in effect, 'You want my robe? Here, take everything! Now you've got all I have except my body. Is that what you'll take next?' . . . By refusing to be awed by their power, the powerless are emboldened to seize the initiative, even where structural change is not immediately possible. This message, far from being a counsel to perfection unattainable in this life, is a practical, strategic measure for empowering the oppressed, and it is being lived out all over the world today by powerless people ready to take their history into their own hands." (See Wink's analysis of these five examples in *Engaging the Powers,* 175–93.)

A third example. "Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles." In those days, as the Roman soldiers barreled through the countryside, burned people's huts, and stole their resources, they would then force the local men to carry their loot for them. But in those days, a new liberal Roman law forbade Roman soldiers from forcing these poor prisoners to walk more than one mile with their packs on their backs.

Go an extra mile, Jesus says. His audience would immediately understand that any soldier who made the people go an extra mile would be arrested for breaking the law and be imprisoned. Jesus is saying, if you did this, all the Roman soldiers themselves would be imprisoned, not you, because they violated their own law. Notice, he does not say, "Fight back and kill the Romans." He also does not say, "Run away, there's nothing you can do." In these teachings, we see Jesus leading a workshop in nonviolence just as Dr. King and the civil rights leaders did with movement participants. Jesus teaches them and trains them to respond to violence with creative nonviolent resistance and in doing so, to transform every dire situation. Use creative nonviolent action to end oppression and you will be free, he instructs. Rev. James Lawson, the great teacher of nonviolence and the main strategist of the civil rights movement, once told me that Jesus could teach this example because he himself had done it. He probably walked an extra mile with a Roman soldier, began talking with him, listening to his story, and disarming him in the process.

Once again, we note that, for Jesus and his own lifelong nonviolent, direct action, this is the methodology of God, the way God works and the way we are to relate with one another. Jesus is not speaking of some utopian world without conflict but a world with conflict in which we all can learn to resolve our conflicts nonviolently, as Wink explains:

> Jesus does not encourage Jews to walk a second mile in order to build up merit in heaven, or to exercise a supererogatory piety, or to kill the soldier with kindness. He is helping an oppressed people find a way to protest and neutralize an onerous practice despised throughout the empire. He is not giving a non-political message of spiritual world-transcendence. He is formulating a worldly spirituality in which the people at the bottom of society or under the thumb of imperial power learn to recover their humanity. . . . One must be creative, improvising new tactics to keep the opponent off balance. To those whose lifelong pattern has been to cringe before their masters, Jesus offers a way to liberate themselves from servile actions and a servile mentality. He asserts that they can do this before there is a revolution. They can begin to behave with dignity and recovered humanity now, even under the unchanged conditions of the old order. Jesus' sense of divine immediacy has social implications. The reign of God is already breaking into the world, and it comes, not as an imposition from on high, but as the leaven slowly causing the dough to rise (Mt. 13:33/Lk. 13:20). (Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 183)

"Give to the one who asks of you," Jesus says in his next example. Instead of making money and hoarding it, he teaches us to give to those in need. He calls his followers to lend money without expecting interest or even the return of the principal, as Wink explains. Be generous, selfless givers. This radical egalitarian sharing is the beginning of the oppressed peoples' own liberation. But it is nothing new, just a revision of the Jubilee Year outlined in the Torah, as Luke will explain further.

Finally, in the fifth example, he says, "Do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow." Lend to others; don't turn your back. Be generous. If we applied these Gospel economics socially and globally, we would end our hoarding, return the resources we have stolen from the poor, feed the hungry, house the homeless, and heal the sick. We would treat everyone with respect and dignity and make social and economic justice for every human being our first priority. Apparently, this egalitarian sharing became a hallmark of the early community, as the Acts of the Apostles testifies.

These five examples show us how to practice creative nonviolent resistance in the face of violence and systemic oppression. Later, Jesus will demonstrate his commandment time and again through his own fearless, daring nonviolence. If his life is read from the perspective of this commandment alone, we see that he practiced creative nonviolent resistance every hour of his public life and engaged in hundreds of disarming nonviolent actions. He is never passive, and he never uses violence or retaliates with violence, but instead stands up and engages in fearless nonviolent direct action each and every time.

Millions of people around the globe are engaged in grassroots campaigns of nonviolent resistance to oppression, war, and empire. As Gene Sharp, Walter Wink, Erica Chenoweth, Maria Stephen, and others have documented, more people are personally involved in local and global grassroots movements of nonviolence today than ever before in history. Perhaps despite the crises of the world, people are beginning to wake up to the teaching of Jesus here in the fifth antithesis, that we have the power to disarm our opponents through organized, thoughtful, steadfast nonviolent resistance. Perhaps humanity is waking up to the truth that

Jesus was right all along, that active, creative nonviolence works. Here's Wink's summary of these amazing teachings:

> Just on the ground of sheer originality the examples of unarmed direct action in Matthew 5:39–41 would appear to have originated with Jesus. No one, not only in the first century but in all of human history, ever advocated defiance of oppressors by turning the cheek, stripping oneself naked in court, or jeopardizing a soldier by carrying his pack a second mile. For three centuries, the early church observed Jesus' command to nonviolence. But nowhere in the early church, to say nothing of the early fathers, do we find statements similar to these in their humor and originality. These sayings are, in fact, so radical, so unprecedented, and so threatening, that it has taken all these centuries just to begin to grasp their implications. (Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 184)

If we do not believe the ancient text, if we need further proof, then hear the teachings of the great practitioners of nonviolence, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive our darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that" (King, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?,* 64–65): Better yet, go and experiment with creative nonviolence in your own daily life. Attend a nonviolence training or organize one for your church or local community. When you join a vigil or demonstration, encourage everyone to adhere to the nonviolence of Jesus and Dr. King and watch how the power of nonviolence disarms everyone, including ourselves. Here's Wink's conclusion:

> Nonviolence must not be misconstrued as a way of avoiding conflict. The "peace" that the gospel brings is never the absence of conflict, but an ineffable divine reassurance within the heart of conflict: a peace that passes understanding. Christians have all too often called for "nonviolence" when they really meant tranquility. Nonviolence, in fact, seeks out conflict, elicits conflict, exacerbates conflict, in order to bring it out into the open and lance its poisonous sores. It is not idealistic or sentimental about evil; it does not coddle or cajole aggressors, but moves against perceived injustice proactively, with the same alacrity as the most hawkish militarist. The programmatic task of what we might call the "Jesus project" in the decades ahead will require moving from largely reactive, episodic, and occasional nonviolent actions to an aggressive, sustained movement. Our goal must be the training of millions of nonviolent activists who are ready, at a moment's notice, to swing into action on behalf of the humanizing purposes of God. (Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 192)

Sixth, "Love Your Enemies; Then You Will Truly Be Sons and Daughters of the God of Universal Nonviolent Love" (5:43–48)

The sixth antithesis is the climax of the Sermon on the Mount. In those days, writers put the key teaching in the center of the text, not toward the end. Everything in the sermon leads up to this verse, but in a way, everything in the entire Bible leads up to this verse: "You have

heard that it was said, 'You shall love your countrymen and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons and daughters of your heavenly God, for God makes his sun rise on the bad and the good and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust."

These are the most radical, political, revolutionary words ever uttered. They are certainly the most radical words in the entire Bible, and the most profound spiritual teachings ever taught. For the last seventeen hundred years, we Christians have done our best to pretend Jesus never said them.

Here Jesus commands us to love the people targeted with death by our nation/state. This is the first point to note: he uses explicit nation/state language. He is not referring to a disagreeable neighbor or a difficult boss or a mean relative. The enemy here refers to that nation which is under attack by your nation. For North Americans, that would mean, over the past five decades, the people of Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Panama, Grenada, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Jesus would want North Americans not only to stop the wars against these people but to actively love these people.

Instinctively we know that we would get in trouble from our government if we somehow sided nonviolently with the people our government wages war upon, and we do not want to get in trouble. We are afraid of the consequences. So we disobey Jesus, go along with our nation/state, sit by while our young people go off to kill or be killed, and support the culture of permanent war and hate. This is the way of the world but not the way of Jesus or God's reign of peace.

Throughout history, the nations have commanded us to hate and kill our enemies. When Jesus commands us to love the enemies of our nation/state, he uses the specific Greek word *agapē*, which is unlike any word in the English language. *Agapē* is unconditional, non-retaliatory, sacrificial, all-encompassing, all-inclusive, nonviolent love, a love by which one gives his or her life for the other—in this case, our enemy. Jesus commands us to practice the unconditional love of God and to do so in the most politically charged arena in the world. We cannot love people and at the same time wage war against them, so his commandment outlaws war, war preparations, killings, bombings, and the development of weapons of mass destruction. He's trying to get us ready to enter God's nonviolent reign of universal love, so he instructs us to see beyond our borders and embrace every human being as a sister and brother, to live in peace with everyone, especially those threatened by our nation/state.

Nowhere in the text does Jesus offer an exception to this commandment. He does not say, "Love your enemies, but if they're really hateful and violent, then you can kill them." There is no exception, no justification, no permission for killing. Killing our enemies is completely forbidden, because we are commanded to love them with *agapē:* unconditional love.

The so-called Just War Theory is never mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount or the four Gospels or the New Testament. It's like saying Jesus taught "just rape" or "just child abuse" or "just racism." It was created over time so that Christians could justify their participation in warfare, even though it is antithetical to everything the nonviolent Jesus taught and lived. In the various versions that exist today, a variety of conditions must be met for warfare to be "morally accepted," including the condition that no civilians will be killed. In today's warfare, however, 90 percent of all victims are civilians (as many UN reports

confirm), so even the standards of the so-called Just War Theory cannot be met. But there is no such thing as a just war. In light of the Sermon on the Mount, it is heresy, and a blasphemy in the face of the God of peace. There is no just war.

Notice that the commandment reads, "Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors. . . ." If we start loving our enemies—that is, the people that our nation/state is trying to kill—then we are going to be persecuted, starting with our relatives, neighbors, and coworkers, and possibly even the ruling authorities. That's a sign that we've truly begun to follow Jesus: we are in trouble for making peace, practicing universal love, and walking the way of the cross. That's why Jesus follows the commandment with a second commandment. "Pray for your persecutors." This is the first time we are told to pray in the Sermon on the Mount! He is not saying, "Pray for your enemies." He does not say, "Pray for yourselves." He specifically commands us to pray for those who persecute us because we publicly show love for the enemies of our nation/state. He wants us to pray for them, that they too might be converted to Jesus's way of universal nonviolent love.

Followers of Jesus are eager to love everyone and should be happy to experiment with this universal, political nonviolent love. Life is short; we want to be citizens of God's kingdom of universal love, so we try to love everyone, including Russians, Iraqis, and Afghanis.

As we meditate on this commandment and try to put it into practice, we might ask why Jesus orders us to take this public, political stand of universal nonviolent love for our nation's enemies. Notice, he does not say, "Do it because it's right." He does not say, "Do it because it's moral." He does not say, "Do it because it's the only practical path to peace." He says, in effect, "Love your enemies because God loves God's enemies." This is the nature of God!

Jesus describes the nature of God in the simplest, clearest terms—God loves every human being no matter what, and if you want to worship, serve, and be related to this God, you must do the same.

This image of a God of nonviolence is a breakthrough in human history. It is the heart of Christianity and, as such, has been mainly rejected by most Christians. It challenges us to question our image of God. Is our God violent or nonviolent? Do we want the God of universal nonviolent love that Jesus tells us about? If we want to be sons and daughters of the living God, are we willing to practice the same universal nonviolent love as God and to accept the social, economic, and political consequences for our public stand? How do we love our nation's enemies? How do we stop our nation from killing our sisters and brothers in enemy nations? How can we help the churches practice universal nonviolent love?

Jesus does not end the six antitheses there. He asks a series of penetrating questions to try and persuade us of the wisdom of *agapē*/love. "If you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." With these questions, Jesus addresses our very limited love, our conditional love, and how it serves the nation/state in the big business of war. Is there any reward for limited love? Is there anything unusual about limited love? Do not the tax collectors and the pagans practice limited love for those who love them, for their brothers?

For the ragtag group of impoverished Galileans listening to these teachings, there was

nothing worse than being compared to a tax collector or a pagan. The tax collectors stole their meager resources and kept them in debt. The pagans were the Romans and other ruling authorities who oppressed and killed them. Jesus says, in other words, if you do not rise to the level of universal nonviolent love and be who you were created to be—the sons and daughters of the God of peace—then how are you any different from tax collectors or pagans?

Dr. King is, for me, the greatest teacher of *agapē* and nonviolence, and he once gave a sermon devoted to the theme of our loving our enemies. He said:

> Love is not this sentimental something that we talk about. It's not merely an emotional something. Love is creative, understanding goodwill for all men and women. It is the refusal to defeat any individual. When you rise to the level of love, of its great beauty and power, you seek only to defeat evil systems. Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system, you love, but you seek to defeat the system. . . . Hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe. If I hit you and you hit me and I hit you back and you hit me back, that goes on ad infinitum. It just never ends. Somewhere somebody must have a little sense, and that's the strong person. The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil. And that is the tragedy of hate, that it doesn't cut it off. It only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe. Somebody must have religion enough and morality enough to cut it off and inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love. (Moore, ed., *Following the Call: Living the Sermon on the Mount Together*, 143)

The climax of Jesus's six antitheses comes when he questions our limited, conditional love to people like ourselves, our fellow countrymen and -women. "What's so unusual about that?" He's looking for unusual, outrageous love, the love that goes beyond all borders, politics, and expectations. Love should not be normal! It should not be the so-called love of our countrymen and -women that in fact upholds the culture of war and ends up supporting the death of people elsewhere in the world. The love Jesus calls for is bold, boundless, public, shocking, even dangerous; this is Godly love.

The final line of chapter 5 has caused problems for centuries. "Be perfect, as God is perfect." The word "perfect" means to have no flaws, no imperfections, no brokenness. And yet, every human being is flawed, broken, and imperfect. This mistaken call to perfection has led to much violence, judgment, and condemnation. The original Greek word, *teleios*, describes, instead, a call to go all the way to the end, to fulfill one's destiny, making everything "complete." Other translations suggest it means "maturity."

In the context of nonviolent universal love, this new understanding makes sense: we are called as weak, flawed, broken human beings to the fullness of nonviolent universal love, to go all the way to the very ends of complete, universal divine love. Jesus says we are to be like God. Luke's Gospel changes the complicated word "perfect" to compassionate or merciful. This helps unpack the original meaning. Be as compassionate, as merciful, as nonviolent, as universally loving as God. That's the goal of our lives. That's the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount in a nutshell. Do this, and you will be sons and daughters of God.