

RELATIONAL REVOLUTION

Banishing Hatred in Our Father's World



Michael Sullivant | Jim Wilder

QUESTION

Can you tell the story of a Christian who learned how to attach to his or her enemy with spontaneous love? Where Christianity is working, moving from hate/fear to spontaneous attachment love will be commonplace. How we learn to love enemies is a story that every Christian from each tradition should tell at least once a week.

In the popular TV movie from a few years back, Son of God, Jesus goes fishing with Peter. After a miracle haul of fish, Jesus bids to Peter, "Come with me." Peter inquires, "What are we going to do?" Jesus calmly and confidently declares, "Change the world." God's way to change the world is through attachment love. When we see others as God sees them our attachment love emerges spontaneously.

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The most positive and practical impact by Jesus and his church follows believers who love their enemies. In practice, our enemies are whoever hates us at the moment. If we love our enemies, we will certainly love our neighbors, our friends and our families – even when we are having a hateful sort of moment. Ironically, these are often the very "enemies" we must love. But does Christian life, as it is generally practiced, teach us how to spontaneously love when we are hated? Learning to love our enemies and teaching others how we escape hatred offers a relational revolution for both church and culture.

A SUCCESS STORY

Father Ubald was already a refugee when he was called to be a Catholic priest and return to Rwanda preaching love. After preaching love for ten years, his parishioners turned on one another in hatred and fear as over 45,000 were killed in just a few days. During this genocide over thirty of Father Ubald's family were killed including his mother. He fled his parish miraculously. Yet, after the genocide, Father Ubald was divinely called to return to his parish preaching Christ's love, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. Both the perpetrators and the survivors were, and are, members of his parish. Father Ubald set an example of loving attachment by forgiving the man who ordered Father Ubald's mother's murder and paying the school tuition for his son. In his parish, Father Ubald prepares survivors and perpetrators to meet face to face in the presence of God and witnesses to offer and beg forgiveness respectively. Together they form a new family and tell the stories of how they learned attachment love. They know how to teach others to love enemies and banish hatred and fear. This degree of loving enemies is possible through Jesus, so how do we learn?

A PROBLEM IN CULTURE AND CHRISTIANITY

Are Christians today effectively changing the culture or is it the other way around? In *The Solution of Choice*, Dr. Marcus Warner and I (Jim) trace how the church followed culture through the Enlightenment from rationalism to voluntarism to exalting power and finally, tolerance.

With Rationalism (the exaltation of human reason), the church promoted truth. During Voluntarism (the exaltation of human will), the church promoted choice. When culture exalted power (both natural and metaphysical), the church message became powerful experiences through the Spirit. Most recently, culture promoted tolerance (a resignation or cynicism regarding human transformation) and churches became safe places of acceptance. Yet, for all the talk about acceptance and tolerance, we are witnessing a rise in hatred and alienation between people. Having lost the relational capital from which to create character change, tolerance becomes enforced uniformity.

The Enlightenment has unleashed progressively dehumanizing forces. Cultures created by the Enlightenment institutionalized slavery, fought world wars, developed nuclear weapons and fomented nationalism, runaway corporate greed, tyranny, ongoing racism, over-reliance on technologies, terrorism, family/community fragmentation, sexual exploitation, political gridlock, and incivility. The Enlightenment brought the industrial revolution and the information society yet human suffering from mental illness, cults, gangs, mass shootings, school violence, debilitating addictions, unwanted pregnancies and children continues to generate hatred.

WHAT IS MISSING? (The basis for change)

Hatred flourishes wherever the growth of the soul is impaired, relationships are malnourished, and culture creates enemies. The Life Model identifies and promotes a systemic and fundamental shift in how we understand relationships. Loving attachments provide the nutrition and healing for human maturity, emotional and relational intelligence and spiritual growth into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the Life Model makes it clear that the Enlightenment solutions of reasoning, willpower, divine power surges and tolerance (alone or together) cannot produce a healthy character that is free from hate.

Consider the elements of spiritual life and formation that believers are told will produce Christian character: prayer; Bible study and memorization; confession; church, seminar and small group attendance; spiritual gifts; evangelism; financial giving; acts of service; teaching others; mission trips; fasting and the list goes on.

Too often these good activities are divorced from healthy relationships with God and people.

Think of these activities as essential ingredients for a cake. Stir them together for a wonderful cake batter, right? But if we offer our family and friends a taste of our amazing cake before baking it we would get fairly negative reactions to our goopy batter!

In an oven, all the ingredients would integrate and transform into a delightful food to share and enjoy. For our spiritual life, a secure relational attachment provides the oven that converts activities and tasks into character-building relationships. In skilled relationships our good practices become integrated, reproducible and joyfully contagious.

Life Model Works has spent 40+ years integrating the best relational neuroscience with biblical practices.

Designing and testing a better “oven” where spontaneous attachment love for enemies replaces hatred has taken a generation. Sustainable, re-humanizing transformation into the character of Jesus is transferable to personal relationships, churches, movements, organizations, and cultures.

The church, by and large, has lost its essential ability to create family. Meanwhile, neuroscience is pointing cultural awareness to the importance of relationships. The Life Model highlights relational elements of the Gospel that have been significantly de-emphasized, marginalized, forgotten or overlooked in Western church culture where our discipleship is overly “heady” and fails to reach our hearts. The Life Model provides practical, proven, biblically and psychologically sound practices that transform rhetoric into a reality bridging the chasm between the head and heart. Relationally acquired, relational skills are quickly disappearing from our lonely, isolated culture because they have not been adequately learned or practiced.

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While theology no longer claims that the sun rotates around the earth, the theological models of how people operate have not been updated in the same way. Theologians know that old models do not work well but, theology is not about to agree on Freud, Skinner, Adler, Leary, Rogers or some other theoretician for a working model of persons. Aristotle or Plato still rule until something more reliable comes along. Freud, himself, said that psychiatry was waiting for brain science to provide a foundational model. In the 1990s, brain scans provided the “decade of the brain”. Just think, we are the first generation in human history that has learned why we have two hemispheres by watching images of the human brain in action. By God’s providence, we now know much more about how our Creator designed us to learn, grow and mature.

The interactions that make us like Jesus are both deeply human and profoundly spiritual. Human connections, maturity, authentic identity, and lasting character transformation described by neuroscience fit hand in glove with ancient biblical wisdom! The Life Model applies this neuroscience to spiritual formation. Learning how human persons operate deepens and accelerates character transformation. We match methods to the way the brain learns character.

For example, we now know that people are more changed by attachment love than by cortically processed facts and thoughts. Attachment love, experienced on a sub-cortical level, is produced through relational joy. The brain science of Dr. Allan Schore at UCLA reveals that relational joy—to be delighted in by a significant other—is the deepest and most profound force in the human brain. Joy eclipses food, sex, power, and even survival when it comes to forming people’s identity and character. Relational joy produces more Christ-like disciples of Jesus.

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Study of the Hebrew word, hesed, reveals that secure attachment love with God and others is critical for loving our enemies. Hate has the chance to grow when we fail to know God’s love for His creatures. Thus, the Life Model aims to build our essential personal attachments with God and others. Our attachments to God must grow through joyfully knowing God. Fears and doubts create toxic attachments to God and others.

The Bible and science agree that a secure identity—becoming fully mature and alive—grows while lovingly surrounded by “our people”. We will not become whole people who reflect Jesus Christ unless we join an eternal network of relationships – the families of Father God in both heaven and on earth! “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name (identity).” (Ephesians 3:14-15)

If every family on earth receives their identity from God the Father then “our people” must ultimately include “every family in heaven and on earth.” When we regard people (or they regard us) as “not my people” we see the roots of being “enemies” from which hatred grows. Thus, loving our enemies develops from a group identity that sees all God’s family with hesed attachment love. Our group identity, at a brain level, develops according to who “my people” include or reject. We have compassion for our people and fear, coldness or even hate for “not my people.”

The brain automatically activates “enemy mode” surveillance when the relational circuits in our right hemisphere (the base of our relational/emotional intelligence) turn off. “Not my people” people are handled like threats or problems. We revert into predatory beings and often say and do hateful things to the person(s) we blame for the problem – even our most cherished loved ones. We dehumanize others to an “it” rather than “one of us” easily justifying our hateful madness.

A VISION: BANISHING HATRED IN OUR FATHER’S WORLD

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said in the face of his enemies, “I’d rather die than hate you.” Christ-like character is grown in communities that actively correct the tendency to view anyone as “not my people” – even people who imagine that they are our enemies. Nothing else strikes the root of hatred. Banishing hatred begins with learning how to prevent our brains from switching into “enemy mode” for anyone who is not my people. Returning quickly to attachment love, joy, peace when our brain kicks in to “enemy mode” is a fundamental brain skill. The Life Model trains this skill by telling the stories of how we learned to love our enemies.

NEXT STEPS

- We invite you to connect with us. We plan to collect and spread stories from every faith tradition of Christ's Body how believers are LEARNING spontaneous love for their enemies (To connect follow us on Twitter @lifemodelworks.)
- Collect and spread stories of how Christians are TEACHING/TRAINING others to move from hate and fear to attachment love.
- STUDY the best ways to learn and teach spontaneous attachment love for enemies. We invite leaders of groups to connect with us in this initiative. Send your leadership profile to info@lifemodelworks.org.
- We encourage you to EXPERIENCE learning spontaneous attachment love for your enemies personally and tell your story to your people.
- To rid our Father's world from hatred, Christians of all traditions must TELL the stories of how you and your people are learning spontaneous attachment love for your enemies as a weekly practice.

A CALL TO ACTION

We are calling the Body of Christ to recapture the spirit of the earliest Christians who, by attachment love devoid of hateful violence, turned the known world upside down (right-side up!) in the first three centuries after the resurrection of our Lord and King. Becoming a people who spontaneously love our enemies can eliminate hate from our Father's world. By telling others each week what we are learning, we will help each other learn to love our enemies.

We are Christ-followers committed to loving one another and "enemies" near and far, disciples who are joyfully intent on banishing hatred in our Father's world. Pray that followers of Jesus everywhere will awaken to a relational revolution. May our churches be authentic extended families for those who were once not a people but become the people of our God and of his Christ.

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