

Love in Action

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TK highly recommends this book!

Sample Chapter

Chapter Five

A Peaceful Heart

Immediately after ordering the ground attack on Iraq, in February 1991, President Bush addressed his nation, saying, "Whatever you are doing at this moment, please stop and pray for our soldiers in the Gulf. God Bless the United States of America." I suspect that at the same moment many Moslems were also praying to their God to protect Iraq and the Iraqi soldiers. How could God know which nation to support? Many people pray to God because they want God to fulfill some of their needs. If they want to have a picnic, they may ask God for a clear, sunny day. At the same time, farmers who need more rain might pray for the opposite. If the weather is clear, the picnickers may say, "God is on our side; he answered our prayers." But if it rains, the farmers will say that God heard their prayers. This is the way we usually pray.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Those who work for peace must have a peaceful heart. When you have a peaceful heart, you are the child of God. But many who work for peace are not at peace. They still have anger and frustration, and their work is not really peaceful. We cannot say that they belong to the Kingdom of God.

To preserve peace, our hearts must be at peace with the world, with our brothers and our sisters. When we try to overcome evil with evil, we are not working for peace. If you say, "Saddam Hussein is evil. We have to prevent him from continuing to be evil," and if you then use the same means he has been using, you are exactly like him. Trying to overcome evil with evil is not the way to make peace.

Jesus also said, "Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother

without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment ... whosoever shall say, 'Thou fool,' shall be in danger of hell fire."

Jesus did not say that if you are angry with your brother, you will be put in a place called hell. He said that if you are angry with your brother, you are already in hell. Anger is hell. He also said that you don't need to kill with your body to be put in jail. You need only to kill in your mind and you are already there.

In the Persian Gulf, many people practiced killing in their minds--Iraqi, American, French, British, and other soldiers. They knew that if they didn't kill, the enemy soldiers would kill them, so they used sandbags to represent their enemy, and holding their bayonets firmly, they ran, shouted, and plunged the bayonets into the sandbags. They practiced killing day and night in their hearts and minds. The damage caused by that kind of practice is huge. I happened to see a few seconds of that kind of practice on TV. Even if President Bush had not given the order for a land offensive, a lot of damage was already being done in the minds and hearts of one million people in the Gulf. Those kinds of wounds last for a long time and are transmitted to future generations. If you train yourself every day to kill during the day and then dream of killing during the night because you have spent so much time concentrating on that, the damage is deep. If you survive, you will bear that kind of scar for many years. This is a real tragedy. We usually count bodies to measure the damage from a war, but we don't count these kinds of wounds in the hearts and minds of so many soldiers. We have to see the real long-term damage that war causes. Soldiers live in hell day and night, even before they go into the battlefield, and even after they return home.

We may think of peace as the absence of war, that if the great powers would reduce their weapons arsenals, we could have peace. But if we look deeply into the weapons, we will see our own minds--our own prejudices, fears, and ignorance. Even if we transport all the bombs to the moon, the roots of war and the roots of the bombs are still here--in our hearts and minds--and, sooner or later, we will make new bombs. To work for peace is to uproot war from ourselves and from the hearts of men and women. To start a war and give the opportunity to one million men and women to practice killing day and night in their hearts is to plant many, many seeds of war--anger, frustration, and the fear of being killed. I felt very sad when I learned that more than eighty percent of the American people supported the Gulf War.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on

thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."

This is Jesus' teaching about revenge. When someone asks you for something, give it to him. When he wants to borrow something from you, lend it to him. How many Christians actually practice this? There is a story about an American soldier who was taking a Japanese prisoner during World War II. While walking together, the American discovered that the Japanese soldier spoke English and that he had been a Christian before he abandoned his faith. So he asked, "Why did you abandon Christianity? It is an excellent religion," and the Japanese man said, "I could not become a soldier and continue to be a Christian. I don't think a good Christian can become a soldier and kill another person." He understood this passage from Matthew. There must be ways to solve our conflicts without having to resort to killing. We must focus our attention on this. We have to find ways to help people get out of difficult situations, situations of conflict, without having to kill.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

This is nondiscrimination. When you pray only for your own picnic and not for the farmers who need the rain, you are doing the opposite of what Jesus taught. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you..." When we look deeply into our anger, we see that the person we call our enemy is also suffering. As soon as we see that, we have the capacity of accepting and having compassion for him. Jesus called this "loving your enemy." When we are able to love our enemy, he or she is no longer our enemy. The idea of "enemy" vanishes and is replaced by the notion of someone suffering a great deal who needs our compassion. Doing this is sometimes easier than we might think, but we need to practice. If we read the Bible but don't practice, it will not help much.

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Everyone makes mistakes. If we are mindful, we see that some of our actions in the past may have caused others to suffer, and some actions of others have made us suffer. We want to be forgiving. We want to begin anew. "You, my brother or sister, have wronged me in the past. I now understand that it was because you were suffering and did not see clearly. I no longer feel anger

towards you." That kind of forgiveness is the fruit of awareness. When you are mindful you can see all the causes that led the other person to make you suffer. When you see this, forgiveness and release arise naturally. You can't force yourself to forgive. Only when you understand what has happened can you have compassion for the other person and forgive him or her.

If President Bush had had more understanding of the mind of President Hussein, peace might have been obtained. President Gorbachev made a number of proposals that could have been acceptable to the allies, and many lives could have been spared. But because anger was there, Mr. Bush rejected Mr. Gorbachev's proposals, and Mr. Hussein gave the order to burn Kuwaiti oil wells. If President Bush had seen clearly the suffering of the Iraqi people, he would not have allowed his anger to be expressed by starting a war. He asked the American people to pray for the allied soldiers. He asked God to bless the United States of America. He did not say that we should pray for the civilians in Iraq or even the people of Kuwait. He wanted God to be on the side of America.

Eighty percent of the American people called the Persian Gulf War a victory--only a few hundred American soldiers were killed. But every human life is precious, and the loss of the 100,000 or more Iraqi people was a great tragedy! You may identify yourself as an American, but that is only partially true. You are more than that. You may have lost just a few hundred American lives, but you also suffered from the Gulf War in many other ways. The deaths of so many Iraqi soldiers and civilians are also casualties that America suffered, because their death was your country's work. When President Bush said, "God bless the United States of America," he was not paying enough attention to the lives of non-Americans. To those of us who are not American, this was not a good image of America. It was selfish and arrogant, and this was also a casualty that America suffered--not just by guns and bombs, but by your President's statement. If the President had said, "God bless us so that the war will end soon and that Americans as well as Iraqis will suffer as little as possible," he could have won a lot more sympathy from people around the world. But he did not say that.

Who is President Bush? President Bush is us. We are responsible for the way he feels, for everything he does. Eighty percent of the people in America supported him in this just war. Why blame him? Our capacity of loving and understanding was so limited. We were not peaceful enough in our own hearts, and we were not able to bring peace to the hearts of other people. When I saw how we prepared for war and practiced killing day and night in our hearts and minds, I felt overwhelmed.

After the parades ended and the yellow ribbons were no longer there, what did we have? What did the wives, husbands, children, brothers, and sisters of the soldiers receive when their loved ones returned from the Gulf after so much fear, hatred, and killing--in reality and in their daily practice? We cannot imagine the long-term effects of watering so many seeds of war.

Please sit still, breathe, and look deeply, and you will see the real losses, the real casualties that America suffered and continues to suffer from the Gulf War. Visualize 500,000 allied soldiers stationed in Saudi Arabia, waiting for the order to invade Iraq, jumping and screaming as they plunge their bayonets into sandbags that represent Iraqi soldiers. You cannot plunge a bayonet into a person without first transforming yourself into a beast. On the other side, one million Iraqi soldiers were practicing the same. One and a half million soldiers were practicing violence, hatred, and fear, and the American public supported them to do so. They thought that this war was somehow clean, quick, and moral. They saw only bridges and buildings being destroyed, but the real casualties were the souls of the men and women who came home after practicing violence for so many months.

How could they do that and remain themselves? When they returned, the soldiers cried for joy; they were alive! Their parents, wives, husbands, children, and friends also cried for joy. But after one or two weeks, the war welled up from within their deepest consciousness, and their families and the whole of society will have to endure their pain for a long time. If you are a psychologist, a playwright, a novelist, a composer, a filmmaker, a lawyer, a legislator, a peacemaker, or an environmentalist, please look deeply into the souls of the soldiers who returned from the war so you can see the real suffering that war causes, not only to soldiers, but to everyone. Then project that image onto a huge screen for the whole nation to see and to learn. If we are able to share the truth concerning the Gulf War, we will be able to avoid starting another war like it in the future. We have to see how deep the wounds of war are. How could anyone call the Gulf War a victory? A victory for whom?