

The Road Less Traveled: From a Lay Leader's Perspective

Greetings, Aldersgate Family!

I hope all of you are doing well and have developed productive, comforting routines during all this sheltering in place. I trust you have discovered some benefits in the midst of this nationwide crisis - like being able to spend more quality time with your families and the Lord.

I have enjoyed my daily Bible readings and the reflection that comes afterwards. I used to journal some and I really need to get back to that practice, because somehow God's lessons get more firmly etched into my heart when I write them down. Actually writing these occasional "columns" probably does more for me than it does for you. You see, when I write something down it means I truly have pondered God's words. For example, today I read this verse and immediately it reminded me of a failing of mine: *"Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always be kind to each other and everyone else."* 1 Thessalonians 5-23

Throughout my life I have struggled with the need to retaliate for a perceived injustice. My typical response has been to use words to hurt someone who has hurt me and because I write for a living and have a "way with words," so to speak, those verbal darts can often hit home with my adversary of the moment. Initially I feel a sense of victory — that I have performed the emotional equivalent of tackling the other combatant. But there are some good things that come with age. I have come to learn that engaging in emotional warfare usually does me more harm than it does the other person because poisonous words poison my spirit. Afterwards, the nasty feelings envelop me and I stew in the anger of the moment.

In the movies, tough guy lines well-delivered may make us cheer. Yet, deep in our spirits, we know that striking back is most often counter-productive. Jesus stressed that in his Sermon on the Mount, *"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'" But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well."* Matthew 5:38-40.

I don't think that Jesus gave this advice simply because He wanted us to be "good people." I think he offered it because He knew how destructive it is for us to try to intentionally hurt another person even if that individual deserves our anger. When we give into those feelings, we become prisoners to them. We are no longer free indeed.

Our lives are not movies. We can choose to act like Rambo by kicking butt verbally, even physically. Or we can take the quieter, gentle path — the one our Lord and Savior traveled. I have tried both ways and I can attest that choosing His way makes for a happier ending.