Jesus’ Teaching on Non-Violence
by Julia Walsh FSPA

When a person or a group of people is being hurt or oppressed they can respond in several ways.
If a victim chooses to resist the violence (instead of passively allow it) then there are three ways to say
“No” to the wrong committed against them.

The typical ways to react and to try to say “No” to being hurt and oppressed is either
FIGHT or FLIGHT. But, there is a problem with both of these options:

**Fight:** If we fight back, we end up becoming just like our oppressor and become that
which we despise. Violence can’t stop violence, it just creates more violence.

**Flight:** If we run away, we let the violence have power over us. It can send the
message that the oppressor has won and is stronger or greater than us. (Sometimes,
however, this is the best thing to do, like in the case of an abusive relationship.)

Although there are situations when fight or flight might be the best way to handle the
situation, Jesus invites us to **A THIRD WAY**.

**The Third Way of Jesus is:**

Non-violent & Creative & Loving & Powerful & Effective

The **Third Way of Jesus** is about standing up to your oppressor in a loving way.
It is about presenting yourself as child of God with equal power, worth and dignity as
the oppressor. It is never about hurting others or hurting yourself. It creatively causes
the oppressor to be surprised, and then challenged toward conversion. The oppressor
can end up looking like a fool and you can end up looking strong.

“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 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.”

-Matthew 5: 38-42

Jesus’ words must be considered within historical context in order to understand the point.

• **Turn the Other Cheek** = In that place and time, slaves are reprimanded by a slap with the back of the right hand
to the right cheek of the slave. To strike an equal, however, you would use your fist and hit him, usually on the left
cheek. Now, if someone treats you as a slave and strikes you on the right cheek, and you turn to him your left
cheek that forces the hitter to treat you as an equal; it exposes the injustice of regarding you as something less.
Thus it challenges the entire system of domination.

• **Hand Him Your Cloak As Well** = If you’re in debt to someone, that creditor might seize your coat, even though
doing so is contrary to the Hebrew scriptures, and this would leave you without a covering in which to sleep. When
that happens, then give your greedy creditor the shirt off your back as well even if it leaves you naked. People will,
of course, be shocked to see you naked. The creditor will be deeply shamed once you explain to the general
public just what happened to your clothes. What Jesus advocates is not attacking your opponent, nor acquiescing
to injustice, but that you use the circumstances of the moment to expose the injustice and disrupt the oppressor’s

• **Go With Him For Two Miles** = If an enemy is forcing you to be their slave and carry their things for a mile, surprise
them and help them for two miles. Then, you’ll be insisting you have the power to make your own choices and
show that you know you have equal dignity. Plus, that’s really being generous and loving your enemies!