

**Steve Watson, Reservoir Church; August 2, 2020**  
**Fighting with God**

Today, Lydia preaches on a strange old Bible story where someone is attacked while in the middle of the night, and that attacker turns out to be God.

The Bible gives us all kinds of permissions to fight when we're angry, and some interesting guidance on how to fight. The psalms are filled with people cursing their enemies, wishing them and their children harm, begging God to end them and their evil ways.

And then Jesus, who prayed the psalms through all his life, also invited, no commanded, his followers to love our enemies and pray for those who do us harm. Pray for them like the psalms do? Or only pray nice prayers? We don't know, but I'm thinking it's probably the former, more complicated set of prayers. Then the letters of the New Testament pick up Jesus' commands and say things like - overcome evil with good, love your enemy because it's a way of pouring burning coals over their head.

Loving our enemy, loving ourselves, loving God turns out to not just be a gentle and nice thing. It's rough and intense too. Sometimes we get to love through fighting.

So we're going to try a little spiritual exercise, if you're willing, - and we're going to get a little weird with it - are you read for weird? - alright, in this spiritual exercise, we look at what we hate most in an enemy and in God, and we notice what we want to do about that. If the language of hate is too strong for you, especially when it comes to God, we'll ask what frustrates you most. And then we're going to use a tactic for loving our enemy that John Lewis and other freedom fighters of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s used for love of enemy, which was to picture the enemy as a small child and see how you want to respond to them after that.

So, if you're up for it, stand up with me. I'll say a short prayer for us, and then I invite you to take up a fighter's stance. Stand like you're about to punch someone or try to attack them - the stance of a boxer or a wrestler or a fighter of any kind.

*God, give us freedom right now, freedom to see the truth about our enemies and about you, freedom to face the truth of how we feel about our enemies and you. And freedom to learn to love our enemy, and to love ourselves, and to love you in all that truth. Amen.*

So get in that fighting stance now, for real, whether you've ever been in a fight in your life or not, imagine it and let it be so in your body. This might make you feel silly, might make you feel strong or aggressive, might make you feel afraid. If you really don't like how it feels, you can take a break or stop. But if it's only a little awkward or silly, give it a shot.

Now picture an enemy of yours - someone famous or important in the world or someone you know that you resent or can't stand, that threatens you, or just someone you're normally OK with, but their behavior recently has really bothered you. As you picture them, while in your fighting stance. Ask: if I could, what do I want to do? Feel free to act that out if you like - throw you punch, slap your slap, kick your kick, whatever. We'll give it a minute.

Notice how that feels. Did you feel stronger? Weaker? Relieved? Ashamed? Confident? Afraid?

What is it like to confront your enemy?

And now, picture that same enemy, but imagine them as the small, helpless infant they once were. They have little baby chubby cheeks and are swaddled in a cloth. It's the same person, but long before they became the enemy they are to you today, long before they became the person they are today.

As you stand in your fighting stance, picturing the infant pre-enemy, what do you want to say or do now? How do you feel toward this infant? If you could say or do one thing, what would it be?

And just for a moment, let's try this out with God. If you're not in your fighting stance anymore, get back into it. Think of what it is about God that is most frustrating to you - something you don't understand, some way you wish God was more present or more active, or doing something more or different in the world. What do you want to say or do to God when God frustrates you?

If you have something hard to say, or even if you want to try throwing a punch, go ahead. God can handle it. We'll take a minute.

Now I want you to picture God as an infant again, as the helpless, little chubby cheeked baby God once was in Jesus Christ, born a poor, brown-skinned commoner in the Middle East, over two thousand years ago. Seeing God as an infant, what do you want to say or do to God now?

How does it feel to picture God with you as an infant? How do you react to this?

We'll give it a second.

We won't do it today, but you could try this exercise with yourself as well - picturing what you hate most about yourself, and then picturing yourself as the small child you once were, and seeing how you react to both parts of you.

Let me close us with a short prayer, though. Release your fighting stance if you haven't. Take a deep breath, open up your palms to signify your openness to God and to this life of yours. And pray with me:

Our God, who made us all, who knows all the parts of us, and who has entered our world, full of love and hate, joy and frustration, friends and enemies, thank you that you are with us all. Thank you that you can handle, that you want, honest people - not just nice people, but all of us. And thank you that can help us engage our whole lives with increasing freedom, and courage, and love. Please do that for us all, God.

Amen.