

# The Successful Protests of Jesus, Dr. King, & Gandhi VS. the Failure of Others

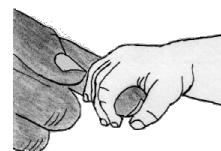
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When we think of Jesus, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Gandhi, we are reminded of the most effective civil rights protests in history. Their success was not accidental. It rested on a moral framework so strong that it reshaped laws, consciences, and even enemies. That framework is largely absent from many modern protest movements —and the consequences are increasingly evident — vicious cycles of hate and violence on both sides!

\* See MLK's protest principles & practices on p. 3. [Yes, a similar essay is needed for law enforcement practices.]



I write this for personal reasons. Two Christian African-American mentors, deeply shaped by the teachings and example of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., helped draw me as a young “white” man out of an angry, divisive, and destructive way of living. One was my black *surrogate* “grandfather”, and the other my red-black *surrogate* “aunt/mother”. (More on their lives below)



What they embodied was not merely political activism, but a moral vision rooted in self-discipline, humility, and compassionate love. That vision changed my life.

Dr. King's & Gandhi's non-violent principles & practices did not originate with them. They openly acknowledged that their philosophy of nonviolent resistance was influenced heavily by the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. And Jesus taught that the *Source* of his Way was the Source of the Cosmos, Who is pure love.

[bold added to quotes below]

## MAHATMA GANDHI —

"Jesus was **the most active resister** known to history. His was **non-violence par excellence**"  
"The Sermon on the Mount... went straight to my **heart**". "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. **Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.**" "Jesus ... [taught] us to **regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love**".

## JESUS —

"You have **heard** that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' **But I tell you, ...** If anyone **forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles....** You have **heard** that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and **hate your enemy**'. **But I tell you, love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you, ..."  
*Matthew 5:38-44*

## DR. KING (MLK) —

"May I say just a word to those of you who are the **victims of the evil system** .... You must continue to work passionately and vigorously for your God-given and constitutional rights. It would be both cowardly and immoral for you patiently to accept injustice. ... **But** as you continue your righteous protest, always be sure that you struggle with **Christian methods [acts of love]** and **Christian weapons**. Be sure that the **means you employ are as pure as the end you seek**. Never succumb to the **temptation** of becoming **bitter**. As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, **using love as your chief weapon**. Let no man pull you so low that you hate him. **Always avoid violence**. If you sow the seeds of violence in your struggle, unborn generations will reap the whirlwind of social disintegration."

In your struggle for justice, **let your oppressor know** that you have **neither a desire to defeat him nor a desire to get even** with him for injustices that he has heaped upon you. ... By **having this attitude**, you will keep your struggle **on high Christian levels**." (*STRENGTH TO LOVE*, pp. 152-153)

"One who breaks an **unjust law** must **do so** openly, **lovingly**, and with a willingness to **accept the penalty**." (*Letter from Birmingham Jail 1963*)

At the heart of Dr. King's approach was a kind of love based on the New Testament term *AGAPE*. It depicts a form of love that stands at the pinnacle of human virtue. Agape love genuinely desires to humbly *draw* its enemies to the way of agape. It desires to transform its enemies into friends. Jesus exemplified this love with *arms open wide* on the cross, *forgiving* and embracing even those who tortured and were murdering him.

This love is not sentimental or passive. It refuses to dehumanize or demonize opponents. It seeks not to crush or humiliate, *but to win over*—to redeem—through humble respect and self-sacrificial action. It desires to *save* even the most violent enemy from the destructive paths that ultimately destroy *both* victim and perpetrator alike.

Dr. King understood something many modern protesters do not: *how you protest shapes what you produce*. Nonviolent, disciplined, morally grounded protest *exposed* injustice without mirroring it. It *appealed* to conscience rather than coercion. It *exposed* brutality by refusing to respond in kind. And in doing so, it *attracted* allies rather than repelling them.

By contrast, many contemporary protest movements operate from anger untethered from moral restraint. They rely on intimidation, destruction, public shaming, and collective guilt. These tactics may generate attention, but they also harden opposition, alienate the persuadable middle, and justify backlash. Instead of transforming hearts, they deepen tribal divisions and confirm the worst fears of those they oppose.

King warned explicitly against this. He knew that hatred multiplies hatred, violence multiplies violence, and darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Only love can do that.

Remembering the powerful world changing success of Dr. King, Gandhi, and Jesus should challenge us to recover the principles that made their movements effective. Those principles they practiced were courage without cruelty, resistance without revenge, *and most of all love that refuses to surrender its humanity*—even when confronted by injustice. That *love* changed nations and the world. It changed my life personally. *Agape* love remains the most powerful force for lasting change we possess.

*If* modern protesters followed these principles as did Jesus, King, & Gandhi, then the current vicious cycle of hate, violence, and death would not continue to escalate. Yes, short-term you can get *superficial* “results” by acting just like those you think are violating justice. *But you will become what you hate!* It can *never* produce a community of peaceful, mutual respect, and love for all. *You and I must model it!*

**DR. KING** — “**Nonviolence** is a powerful and **just weapon**. It is a weapon **unique** in history, which **cuts without wounding** and **ennobles** the man who wields it.” (*Nobel Peace Prize Lecture 1964*)

**PAUL, the Apostle of Love, who was transformed from a life of bitter hate & violence —**

“For though we live in the world, **we do not wage war as the world does**. The weapons we fight with are **not the weapons of the world**. On the contrary, . . . **We demolish arguments** [*not people*] and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God [*who is love*], and we take captive [*not people*] every [*anti-love*] **thought** to make it obedient to Christ [*who taught the way of love*].” (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

**DR. KING** — “In your struggle for justice, let it be your guiding principle that **nonviolence seeks to create** a beloved **community** and **avoids** not only **external** physical violence but also **internal** violence of spirit.” (*Stride Toward Freedom 1958*)

**REV. MICHAEL CURRY — the first black leader of the historically white Episcopal churches**

“As part of their **training** for **nonviolent** protest, Dr. King composed a set of practices, ... And here’s part of what it said: Remember, the **nonviolent movement seeks** justice and **reconciliation**, not just victory. Remember, always walk and talk in a **manner of love**, for God is love. ... Remember, sacrifice personal wishes so **that all might be free**. Remember, observe with friend and foe alike, the ordinary, **normal rules of courtesy**. .... Remember, **refrain from violence** of the **fist** and violence of the **spirit**. ... But **the first thing** on the list ...., **meditate on the life and the teachings of Jesus.**” (p 34 *THE POWER OF LOVE*)

**ChatGPT Research Summary of MLK’s Principles for Nonviolent Protests, especially with Police Presence**

**“CORE DISCIPLINE**

Bring *no* weapons to a protest.  
Commit in advance to *absolute* nonviolence, regardless of provocation.  
Understand that self-control is *strategic*, not merely moral.  
Remember: Your behavior represents the movement, not just yourself.

**“WHEN CONFRONTED BY POLICE**

Do not strike back under any circumstances.  
Do not shove, grab, or resist physically, even to protect yourself.  
Do not run, evade, or attempt to escape arrest.  
Do not verbally abuse, threaten, or taunt officers.  
Maintain calm posture; avoid clenched fists or aggressive movements.  
Keep hands visible when possible.

**“DURING ARREST**

Submit peacefully and deliberately.  
Walk when instructed; do not force officers to carry or restrain you.  
Offer no resistance, even if the arrest is unjust.  
Say nothing that escalates tension; silence is acceptable.  
Accept handcuffs or detention without protest or struggle.

**“ATTITUDE TOWARD OFFICERS**

Do not regard police as personal enemies, but as fellow humans with families.  
Recognize officers as agents of law, not the actual source of moral injustice.  
Avoid hatred, bitterness, or contempt—internally and externally.  
Remember: winning the conscience of the public matters more than winning a confrontation.

**“PURPOSE OF ACCEPTING ARREST**

Accepting arrest exposes unjust laws, not weakness. Jail is not defeat; it is moral testimony.  
Willingness to suffer without retaliation:  
- Reveals moral contrast  
- Draws public attention to injustice  
- Preserves legitimacy of the cause

**“WHAT NONVIOLENCE IS NOT**

Not cowardice, Not passivity, Not compliance with injustice, & Not silence about wrongdoing.  
Nonviolence is active resistance without physical force.

**“INTERNAL DISCIPLINE**

Guard against: Anger, humiliating officers, desiring revenge  
Pray, sing, or center yourself mentally if provoked.  
Remember: Violence by one protester discredits the whole movement.”

**[ . . . end of ChatGPT’s summary ]**

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A year ago, I wrote a 2-page essay on my website, “**PLEASE STOP FUELING THE FIRES WITH EXTREMISM**”. I shared some *general* principles from psychological and sociological research about compassionate love vs. *our* human tendency toward *self*-serving extremism, confirmation bias, and escalating cycles of misunderstanding, inaccurate judgments, unnecessary division, and violence. But, this essay is more *specific* to the why and how of successful *protests* against injustice. So in light of Dr. King, Gandhi, and Jesus, I encourage *each of us* to *please* consider some practical thoughts for honest *self*-examination:

- Are our heart attitudes, motives, and thoughts guided by humble, empathetic compassion for *all* people involved in the social systems of justice and injustice (*both the oppressed and their families who hope for a peaceful life, & also the law-officers and their families who risk their lives to protect all of us from violent criminals*)? Or are our attitudes self-righteously *prejudging* & fueling hate, not love?
- Are our personal opinions based on sufficient research in order to gain accurately balanced perspectives? Or are they formed by superficial exposure to our favorite biased echo-chamber groups (*news media, online sites, religious or political communities*)?
- Are our words in our own heads (*self-talk*), & with friends privately, & in public places (*online, in coffee shops & bars, in the streets during protest*) clearly communicating the kind of peacemaking language and tone that have potential to draw “enemies” into becoming *friends*?
- Are our actions during protests mirroring the best, most effective of the attitudes, motives, thoughts, and words described above? Or are our actions unnecessarily provoking (tempting) others to react with fear, hate, & violence? *Again, are we becoming just like those we hate?*

## **MR. WILL HALL’S and MRS. JERLINE HENSON’S WAY OF CROSS-TYPE LOVE**

### **MR. HALL –**

I grew up (as a young “white” boy) in Shreveport, Louisiana at a time when racism was *publicly* cruel. I’m almost 70 now, and back then I had no involved biological grandfather in my life. So, Mr. Hall became the one I *needed* - my surrogate *black* “grandfather”. As a boy and youth, I worked with Mr. Hall, a 6’ 5’ gentle giant of a man, helping him in his job doing apartment maintenance and landscaping. Even though no human being is actually pure white or black, Mr. Hall was one of the darkest *melanin* men I’ve known. So, he was often a target for “white” racists as we drove around town doing jobs and buying supplies. Yes, shop owners and police used the “N” word, and sometimes referred to Mr. Hall as “boy”, even though he was in his 50’s & 60’s at the time. Yet, each time, I’d witness him stand, not in arrogant pride or bitter resentment, but in a strong, compassionate love – even for his “enemies”.

Not me! Whenever those kinds of things would happen, I’d seethe *inside* and express to him my rage *after* we left a store or a job. I remember one time when I was 15, I told him that I was going to *burn-down* a racist man’s auto parts store, because he’d tried to humiliate Mr. Hall in front of a group of other customers. But Mr. Hall turned to me and basically said:

“Sid, that man and his friends in the store are living lives of emptiness and insecurity without real love. So, they’ve learned to humiliate others in order to try and feel important. Yes, I could react like them and either say something insulting in return or even hit them. But that would just make things worse, and it wouldn’t help them change. The best way to help them grow is to show them kind of love that they’re missing in their lives. And, the most powerful time to do that is when they’re living the opposite of love towards me. It’s what Jesus lived all his life, especially on the cross when he loved and forgave those who tortured and were killing him. And, it’s what Dr. King lived as one of Jesus’s *true* followers.”

Back then, I marveled at Mr Hall's amazing ability and willingness to love like that. I watched him over time actually win enemies into becoming his *friends*. I wanted to be like him, and I knew he didn't have it by just going to "church" like so many "Christian" *hypocrites* I saw. I knew it was because he was deeply committed and truly surrendered to the way of compassionate self-sacrificing love, for all people, even those who act like our *enemies*. But foolishly, I was an angry, bitter youth, due in part to my difficult home family situation, and wasn't ready or *willing* to surrender to anyone, not even God. So, it took me another five or so years of foolishly living "my way" and creating constant life conflict, before I finally was willing to do what my black "grandfather" modeled for me. I knew I had to choose a new way. Instead of reacting with my arms ready to hit others or just protect myself. Finally, I chose to open my arms in love to embrace, to hug, even my "enemies".

### **MRS. HENSON —**

As a care-taker for my grandmother and a sitter for me and my sisters as children, Mrs. Henson had become a part of our family. She had no biological children, so we were like her own. She went on vacations with us, especially when my father had planned a fishing vacation. My dad and Mrs. Henson loved fishing. She was nicknamed "Red" by her friends because of her African and Native-American ancestry. Mrs. Henson grew up as a young girl on the same street with B.B. King when he was a youth. Her brother Johnny even was a member of BB's band for a while. She used to call BB "Butterbean" as a kid, because she cooked them for him and he loved them so much. BB moved on to bigger and better things due to his phenomenal musical talent.

But, just like Mr. Hall, Mrs. Henson experienced the cruelties of open, public racism that saturated life in the old South — especially Shreveport. Yet, she too, just like Mr. Hall, *radiated* a love for *all* people, even for those who acted like her enemies. And by the same "way of agape", she won many of them into becoming her friends. For me, she was the source of *motherly*, unconditional love that helped finally turn my heart back to God, the Source of love. Her wise, patient counseling along with Mr. Hall's, and especially their strong, courageous lived examples, kept chipping away at my bitterness toward authorities — especially the police.

Both Mr Hall and Mrs. Henson often shared with me what they'd learned about life and reality from Jesus and Dr. King — about the transforming power of enemy-love. No, I'm sure they didn't live perfect love, though in my memory it looked like it! And I surely haven't lived perfect love personally. When I fail in thought, word, or action to live the way of agape, I know to seek the gift of forgiveness from God the Source of love and from the people I've hurt. I've learned that reapplying the way of love is the only way to truly heal and reconcile relationships.

### **MORE QUOTES REGARDING PEACEFUL & THEREFORE SUCCESSFUL PROTESTS**

#### **JESUS —**

"And I, **when I am lifted up** from the earth *[on the cross]*, I will draw all *[types of]* people to myself."

"He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die." *(John 12:32-33)*

"Blessed are the **peacemakers**, for they shall be called children of God *[the Source of Love]*." *(Matthew 5:9)*

**DR. KING** — "An individual **who breaks a law** that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly **accepts the penalty of imprisonment** in order to **arouse the conscience** of the community... is in reality expressing the highest respect for law." *(Letter from Birmingham Jail)*

#### **DR. KING —**

"And **modern psychology** is calling on us now to **love**. But long **before modern psychology** came into being, the **world's greatest psychologist** who walked around the hills of Galilee told us to **love**. He looked at men and said: 'Love your enemies; **don't hate anybody**.'"

"... Now there is a final reason I think that **Jesus says, "Love your enemies."** It is this: that **love has** within it a **redemptive power**. And there is a power there that eventually **transforms** individuals. That's why Jesus says, "Love your enemies." Because **if you hate** your enemies, you have **no way** to redeem and to transform your enemies. But

if you love your enemies, you will discover that at the very root of love is the power of redemption. You just **keep loving people** and keep loving them, even though they're **mistreating you**. Here's the person who is a neighbor, and this person is doing something wrong to you and all of that. Just keep being **friendly** to that person. Keep **loving** them.

**Don't** do anything to **embarrass them**. Just keep loving them, and they can't stand it too long. **Oh, they react** in many ways in the **beginning**. They react with bitterness because they're mad because you love them like that. They **react with guilt feelings**, and sometimes they'll hate you a little more **at that transition period**, but just keep loving them. And by the power of your **love they will break down** under the load. That's love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love. There's something about **love that builds up** and is **creative**. There is something about **hate that tears down and is destructive**. "love your enemies."

#### **PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN ROME WITH HIS QUOTE OF PROVERBS 25:21 —**

**Romans 12:18-21** "... so far as it **depends on you**, be at **peace with all** people. **Never** take your own revenge, ... for it is written [*in Proverbs 25:21*], ....

'If your **enemy** is hungry, **feed him**, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals [*of guilt & shame*] on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, **but overcome evil with good.**"

#### **REV. MICHAEL CURRY — the first black leader of the historically white Episcopal churches**

"I've come to see the **sharing of stories** as a powerful form of **Gandhi's nonviolent action** satyagraha, the "**truth force**." It's standing by and speaking our truth. It's **standing and kneeling** at the same time. It's **protecting not protesting**. **Stories** are not a concession, but **the context for conversion of the heart**. (p. 219 *LOVE IS THE WAY*)

"**Walking love's way** sometimes demands and **requires** standing up in public for those core values you believe are under attack. **Like the Standing Rock Sioux**, we can stand as **protectors, not protesters**, rising up to help others **transcend politics** and remember what's worth saving and growing and holding close. Which brings us back to ... **our desire to make a loving public witness**."

..... **Christians** in the police state of **Soviet East Germany** who had started a movement of **candlelight vigils** through the city. The **protesters walked peacefully** through the streets with candles, **singing** hymns. It started as a few hundred faithful on the streets of Leipzig, but **over time, almost the entire city** was turning out with their candles. The movement spread further—and many believe it contributed **to the fall of the Berlin Wall**." (p. 237 *LOVE IS THE WAY*)

"People wanted to call the White House action a protest, but I was adamant: **It was prayer, not protest. We weren't there to wave fingers** at our president or anyone else. We were there to declare our own beliefs and to pray **with open hearts** for our leadership. We were there to seek higher ground and **discover common ground**. We were not protesters but **protectors** of Jesus's **way of love**."

..... We are not a partisan group. We are **not a left-wing group**. We are **not a right-wing group**. We are a **Jesus movement**. That's who we are. And we came **together**, Protestant, Catholic, and evangelical. We came together, Republicans, Independents, and Democrats. We came **together**, liberal, conservative, and whatever is in the middle. We came **together** because **what binds us together** is Jesus of Nazareth **and his way** and his teaching and his life.

.... Love your neighbor—that's why we are here. Love the neighbor you like and **love the neighbor you don't like**. Love the neighbor you agree with and **love the neighbor you disagree with**. Love your Democrat neighbor. Love your Republican neighbor. Love your Independent neighbor. Love your Black neighbor, your White neighbor. Love your Asian neighbor, your Latino neighbor, and your Indigenous neighbor. Love your South American neighbor. Love your LGBTQ neighbor, love your Jewish neighbor, love your Muslim neighbor. Love, love, love, love your neighbor as yourself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets. (p. 239-240 *LOVE IS THE WAY*)

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