



GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

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GO GENTLY

The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." 2 Samuel 18:5

Dr. Paul Brand was one of the medical heroes of the 20th century. Brand, challenged by the needs he confronted among the lepers of India, became one of the leading hand surgeons in the world, pioneering medical procedures in completely uncharted territory. The story of how Brand got to India is much too long to relate, but the short version is having completed medical school in Britain, he returned home to India where he had grown up as a child, and there made a difference in the lives of thousands of hurting people.

The first year he was in Vellore, India, he served as a general surgeon, treating whatever needs he saw, but then Brand was confronted with a steady stream of patients whose limbs were twisted—"clubfeet" as they were labeled. The problem, a genetic deformity, caused the foot to rotate inward. The accepted procedure of the day was to force the foot into the proper position; then tape it to splints.

But Dr. Brand observed that this harsh treatment often left scar tissue and broke ligaments which required long months of recuperation. There had to be a better way, he reasoned. He began searching for an answer. As the doors of a foot clinic were opened, he was nearly trampled on as people pushed and shoved to get in. Dr. Brand began to gently manipulate and press deformed feet into place, then place them in casts until they had healed, gradually winning the battle with deformity. In his book co-authored with Philip Yancey called *The Gift of Pain*, Brand says, "I learned a fundamental principle of cell physiology: gentle persuasion works better than violent correction" (Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *The Gift of Pain*, OMF Literature, Manila, 2002, p. 84). Did you note the poignancy of his phrase, "gentle persuasion works better than violent correction"? It's not only true of correcting clubfeet but it works equally as well when it comes to the science of persuasion, the discipline of children, and the art of leadership.

David knew that gentle persuasion works better than violent correction; thus he instructed, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom" even though Absalom had rebelled against his father and wanted to depose him as king. Joab, however, quickly forgot David's instructions and dealt harshly with him.

When it comes to the correction of children, gentleness is the difference between punishment and discipline. Paul instructed that gentleness be used in helping someone who has strayed acknowledge that he has gone wrong. He says, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

Thomas Aquinas, who knew a great deal about education and persuasion, once said that when you want to convert someone to your view, you go over to where he is standing, take him by the hand (mentally speaking), and guide him. You don't stand across the room and shout at him; you don't call him a dummy; you don't order him to come over to where you are. You start where he is and work from that position. That's the only way to get him to budge. ("Points to Ponder," *Reader's Digest*, Nov. 1973, p. 268).

When Joanne Shetler was working among the Balangaos, a tribe in Northern Philippines, members of a cult began to lead some of the believers astray. Jo used violent correction—strong words condemning what they had done. But a father-like figure who was a tribal leader took her aside and told her she just didn't know how to correct people. He pointed out that violent confrontation made enemies without changing hearts, but gentle correction resulted in changed lives who were committed to the truth. Dr. Brand was right: gentle persuasion is far better than violent correction, whether you are correcting deformities of the feet or of the mind. It's still true.

Resource reading: Galatians 6.