One of the common words used in our Dr. Phil world today is the word trigger. Most of us have what psychologists would call triggers. A trigger, of course, is that little piece on a handgun or rifle and if you pull that trigger the gun goes off. Well, we all have triggers I think. And if you find yourself in a situation, or someone says something that hits that trigger in you, you just sort of go off. I have a few, and one of them is confined spaces, and last week I had to go in for an MRI and it wasn’t the ring, it was the tube. And even the thought of being strapped down in that tube, just tripped my trigger. There is no danger of any kind, it is totally irrational, but you can’t control it. It just controls you. I found out about it, maybe 10 days ahead of time and those 10 days were not good for me, every time I thought about being in that tube it pulled the trigger. I woke up one night thinking that I was in the tube and couldn’t get out and it was it just like in movies. Sweaty, I’m walking around the house, turn on the TV, and the radio at the same time and sit in a chair with all the lights on, and just try to not be triggered anymore. I told them about it ahead of time, and I remember how slowly and gently the guy put on those straps. Don’t want to pull that trigger. I think I know how it happened, when I was a young kid, I got thrown in a box by some older kids in my neighborhood and taped in. And it was like being a coffin I couldn’t get out. And it’s crazy but these experiences are in you somehow, and it doesn’t matter that it’s almost 60 years later, you hit that trigger and your right back in the box. It’s like a time machine. It’s one of the most fascinating things about how we’re made.

It doesn’t have to be so dramatic. You can hear an old song and it can trigger you. And you’re right back where you heard that song. It’s not always negative, it’s why people restore an old car that their dad had or a tractor or why they hunt for a certain kind of furniture. Because it can trigger positive memories. In the church around Christmas for some reason it’s really powerful. And people want certain hymns and certain rituals and that’s why. Because those are things that trigger positive experiences and feelings from the past. You want to pull that trigger.

But triggers today are usually associated with some kind of bad experience or trauma. Someone could call you a fool or an idiot and if you got a lot of that in your past, at the right moment that could pull the trigger. Boom. Someone cuts you off in traffic, or disrespected you in some way. Boom. There’s something in you that touched. There are certain people, that if I see them on the TV screen just pull my trigger. It just takes over this irrational kind of ugly response. There are a lot people who got a lot of shame in their past and if you make them look bad, even unintentionally, you’re done. It’s this instant “forget it, I’m done,” and that’s it. I ate hamburger helper once when I was on a Boy Scout hike and got sick that night. Every time I look at a hamburger helper box, I can still remember that night. Ugh. I’ll never eat stuff that ever again. That’s the trigger

The important thing to understand about triggers though, is that when you’re triggered you are completely under the control of that which triggers you. In other words, you are easily controlled when you are easily triggered. You’ve lost your freedom. Kids know this instinctively I think. I remember when I was a kid there was a girl who had some kind of learning disability and was in what at the time was called special ed. But we shared the same recess time, and someone found out that you if said the words, “Tijuana brass” to this girl that she would go crazy and start to cry. Just started shaking her arms around and screaming. And so guess what happened when we found out about it? Yup. Every dimwit kid in the school yard had to go up to her and yell “Tijuana brass” Tijuana brass”. Once people find out what your triggers are they can control you. Easily. They have you right where they want you. Either that or they’ll have walk on eggshells all the time. Because you don’t want to step on that trigger.

We simply do not get this today as a culture. I remember years ago when I first came to Nebraska, in the little town I lived in there was this terrible thing that happened every Halloween. Guess what would happen if you left you your pumpkin outside? Yeah, it ended up smashed on the street. Guaranteed. And every year in the town newspaper the following week there was this big editorial letter from some person in the community who just went off on “kids these days” and you know the rest. It’s the same tape over and over, and it happened over and over every year. Pumpkins got smashed, next week there was the letter about kids these days. And I would just sit there and read this and think. “Don’t you get it?” “Don’t you get, that your letter is exactly why they do it?” Don’t you see that you, going off, are completely under their control?

So let’s bring it right to today. Can’t you see, when you’re watching the evening news and getting all frustrated that you are under their control? That when you start to boil, you’re under their spell? This is our culture now, the whole point is to trip your trigger get you mad, and therefore easily controlled? Do we really want to live like this? Is this living? Isn’t there something we can do about this? Don’t we realize that there might be some kind of alternative? Can we be saved from this?

Think about the conversations that you have with people. How much it is about what trips your trigger? What dorky thing you saw last week that made you mad? I had to think about it this week in my own life. All those conversations about what people wear during the superbowl show, or how they dance. There’s not much thought or reflection that goes into this is there? It’s just sort an automatic, thoughtless way of experiencing life. What is this inside of us that keeps getting triggered? That sets us up to willingly give up our freedom and be so easily controlled?

What was your reaction when you first heard our Gospel lesson today? But I say to you that listen. You’ve got to be kidding right?. Love your enemies. Silly church ideals. But it’s not that, this is the core the teaching of Jesus. This is what he taught when he said he came to bring the kingdom of God. This is what it is. This is what he came to make available. Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. Why does it seem so ridiculous? Why does it seem so hard, so yea right. Maybe because its because we’re so easily triggered all the time and have never heard of or considered an alternative.

Then, looking at it another way, maybe these words and this message might make more sense if we realize what we would have without them. What if Jesus had taught us to hate our enemies, to do evil to those who hate you. To curse those who curse you. To cancel the abuser. What if Jesus had taught us that if someone hits you on the check to hit back 10 times harder? To not give to those who beg. What if he had taught only do good if you’ll get something in return? What if Jesus had taught us to judge and condemn and ridicule others. What would we have then? We would have a world without hope. Because this is the world we already live in isn’t it. If that’s what Jesus is about we don’t need it. Because we already have plenty of that. How much more easily upset can we be at this point in this culture?

Wouldn’t it be nice to be free? Once you recognize what it’s like to hate you enemies, what it’s like to be frustrated all the time watching the evening news…..I mean I talk to people all time who’ve just bailed out. 10 minutes of the evening news and they’re all mad. Triggered. Wouldn’t it be nice to be free from that? To not be so easily controlled. Maybe these words aren’t so crazy after all. Maybe they are exactly what we need. Maybe there is a God reality, all around us. A breath of fresh air, of freedom. So I’m not at the mercy of all these people who want to trip my trigger. You don’t have to respond in kind. Such a breath, a life giving breath of fresh air and healing.

I’m not saying never get upset or never fight back. It’s not all or nothing. That would be silly. Our Gospel isn’t rules, they aren’t law. What this is, is freedom. What this is, is wisdom. What this is, is life. A calm a peace. Here’s a project. Here’s a little discipline you might try to begin to understand the kingdom of God that Jesus is talking about here. Turn on the news. If you watch Fox, turn on CNN. I’m serious. If you’re more CNN, MSMBC turn on Fox. Or newsmax or whatever. And just practice. Be a disciple. Believe that what Jesus came to bring is possible. I won’t let them trip my trigger. This isn’t some lofty dream or impossible goodness. It’s just down to earth learning to receive the power of the Spirit. You get good at not letting people trip your trigger and you’ll be powerful. And enjoy life a lot more. And make better decisions. God has this gift for you.

By the way, I did have my MRI last Wednesday morning. They put me in that tube. I was just numb driving up there. And I was hoping that I would have a least some time in the waiting room but nope, fill out a few forms and they took me back to the tube. And I didn’t know what to pray but I just asked God to help me. Real profound, pastor. And I just laugh thinking about how carefully that guy strapped me in. And in I went. And there were a couple of times I could feel myself beginning to go crazy. But somehow I never did. It didn’t have to trip my tirigger. A little taste of the kingdom of God that Jesus came to bring. Amen.