

Series: "The Fruit of the Spirit"
"Gentleness"

We're well into this series of messages where we're looking at the fruit of the Spirit – human qualities and character traits that will be seen in our life if the Holy Spirit is in control. We've looked at love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and now today *gentleness*.

The word translated gentleness is the Greek word *πραυτη* (pray-u-tase). It's a word that's very difficult to translate into English. It can mean gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness. Most often it's translated *gentleness*.

Gentleness can be defined as being kind, tender, having a generally kind and agreeable manner. People filled with the Spirit of Christ will be known for their *gentleness*.

I don't know that I've ever heard, or that I've ever preached before, a sermon just on gentleness. yet, it's mentioned more than we might think in the Bible! Ephesians 4:1-2 says, "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and *gentleness*, with patience, bearing with one another in love." Part of our calling if we're followers of Jesus is to live a life of gentleness. Colossians 3:12 tells us: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, *gentleness*, and patience." Philippians 4:5 says, "Let your *gentleness* be known to everyone."

This same word for gentleness is used to describe Jesus! Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "By the humility and *gentleness of Christ* I appeal to you..." (2 Corinthians 10:1). Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am *gentle* and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). I love those words of Jesus! He said, "Come to Me. I'm humble. I'm gentle."

In many respects, the world is not a gentle place, is it? Violence abounds – mass shootings, road rage, armed robberies. No place is safe. People ridicule or attack one another because of their beliefs, their political views, their weight, their skin color, their nationality. Kids bully one another in school or on the playground or online. You don't see much gentleness on display when you watch TV – soap operas, reality shows, sitcoms, crime shows. Or in movies. It's a rough-and-tumble world, and you have to be mean and hard-nosed to survive. But followers of Jesus are to be different. The fruit of the Spirit is....gentleness.

Bible scholar William Barclay, in his commentary on Galatians, says this Greek word for gentleness has three shades of meaning to it. It describes someone who is (1) submissive to the will of God; (2) humble and teachable – not too proud to learn; and (3) considerate. Let's look at these in more detail.

Gentleness describes the person who is submissive to the will of God. So often we associate gentleness with weakness. Maybe a soft, delicate lady, or a man who is kind of girlish,

effeminate. Actually, not all women are gentle! Just watch The View on TV, or lady wrestling! *Gentleness is not weakness!* It doesn't mean being a pushover, a doormat, someone who lacks assertiveness.

There's a story about some Americans were stationed in Korea during the Korean War. While there, they rented a home and hired a local boy to cook and clean for them. These Americans were a bunch of jokesters, and they soon began to take advantage of the young boy's naiveté. They'd smear Vaseline on the stove handles so that when he'd turn the stove on in the morning he'd get grease all over his fingers. They'd put little water buckets over the door so that he'd get deluged when he opened the door. They'd even nail his shoes to the floor during the night. Day after day, the Korean boy took the brunt of their practical jokes without saying anything. No blame, no self-pity, no temper tantrums. But finally this weighed on their consciences. They said they were sorry, and agreed to stop with their pranks. The houseboy could hardly believe it. "No more sticky on the stove?" he asked. "Nope" "No more water on door?" "Nope." "No more nail shoes to floor?" "Nope, never again." "Okay," the boy said with a smile, "no more spit in soup." Well, I guess the boy wasn't as gentle and accepting as they had thought!

Gentleness is not weakness! The Greek word was used to describe an animal that had been tamed, power brought under control. Like a wild horse that has been "broken" or tamed. Actually, sometimes it's said that the horse has been "gentled". A rider not nearly as big and powerful as the animal has the horse under control. Or it's like a mighty river with rushing waters going through a hydroelectric dam, the powerful flow of water harnessed and tamed to provide electricity.

Our one son and his wife at one time had an English Mastiff named Kyra. Kyra was a huge, strong dog. I often joked that I was going to buy a saddle and ride her. But she was so gentle. One time Nancy and I were visiting, and Nancy was holding our dog on her lap (a little Dachsund at the time). And Kyra came up to me and worked herself onto my lap. She was gentle; I was about crushed!

The gentleness that's a fruit of the Spirit is not weakness, but strength under control. Under God's control! *We see this in Jesus.* He had all the power of God at His disposal. He was and is King of kings and Lord of lords. And yet He humbled Himself, and surrendered Himself completely to doing the Father's will. Jesus was no weakling! He was gentle, yet He had more courage and "guts" than any of us! Followers of Jesus filled with *gentleness* are those whose natural selfish and sinful desires have been tamed, and brought into submission to God, and God's purposes.

That word *gentleness* also describes those who are ***humble and teachable, not too proud to learn.*** Do you know anybody who knows everything – or *thinks* they know everything? You can't tell them anything; they know it all! (Hopefully, you're not one)!

How many parents wish their children were more humble and teachable! Kids hit a certain age when they suddenly know it all! Sometimes it's delayed until they go off to college, then they

really know it all. But sometimes kids wish their parents would quit thinking that *they* know it all. Want to turn a kid off really fast? Just start, "Well, back in *my day*..."

We certainly could use more humble and teachable people when it comes to the Bible and religion. People who think *their* interpretation of Scripture is the only right one. People who simply dismiss the Bible as an irrelevant book (and there are more of them these days). But maybe never even read it. They don't come to the Bible with a humble, teachable spirit. Some people have simply written off *the church*, formed their own view of the church and decided it's not for them, even though they've never come, or have not been to a church service since childhood.

How about people stuck in their political views? Facebook, or Instagram. The political postings. How many people are going to change their views because of what's posted? Not many! Where the intent is not to have an open-minded sharing and discussion of political issues, but to jam my view down others' throats! Imagine the progress we could make if people were more gentle and humble and teachable in this area! Think what a difference it would make if our senators and representatives and political leaders were more humble and teachable!

Gentleness. Not weakness, but strength brought under God's control; being humble and teachable. And this word *gentleness* also means ***to be considerate***. How gentle and considerate are we with people? How gentle are we with people who've failed? How much do we consider their side of the story? The child who fails and disappoints us? The neighbor or acquaintance who once again gives in to an addiction? The church member who messes up their life and reputation?

The Apostle Paul helps us get a healthy perspective on this. Remember, Paul was no mild-mannered Mr. Milquetoast! *He was a terrorist!* He was directly or indirectly responsible for the suffering and death of Christians. He terrorized the early church until he met Jesus and was changed. Yet, look at what he writes to the Thessalonians: "As you know, we never used flattery, and God is our witness that we didn't have greedy motives. We didn't ask for special treatment from people—not from you or from others — although we could have thrown our weight around as Christ's apostles. Instead, we were gentle with you like a nursing mother caring for her own children. We were glad to share not only God's good news with you but also our very lives because we cared for you so much" (1 Thessalonians 2:5-8). Can you feel the empathy and considerateness of Paul's words?

When some in the church in Corinth were questioning his motives, he says he'll come to them, but not with a rod to punish them: "What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" (1 Corinthians 4:21). He wrote to the young pastor Timothy that the Lord's servant should correct opponents "with gentleness" (2 Timothy 2:25). Paul writes to Titus to remind Christian believers "to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be *gentle*, and to show every courtesy to everyone" (Titus 3:2). Notice, "show every courtesy to *everyone*."

We've all seen packages, or maybe mailed packages, that said: "Fragile. Handle With Care!" Well, that label can be put on humans, too. We're all fragile, and vulnerable. Everyone is fighting some kind of battle. Yes, sometimes we love and help people best by giving them a kick in the pants. Tough love. But most people are aware of their failures and limitations. We don't know how hard someone may have tried to resist a temptation. We don't know all the factors that led a person to do something foolish, or bad. When we're broken, when we've failed and we know it, we don't need harsh correction; we need people to stand by us who are gentle and considerate. People, according to Chuck Swindoll, "possessing tact and gracious courtesy that causes others to retain their self-esteem and dignity."

Here's a true story about a pastor by the name of Stu Weber. Stu had a bad temper that got worse when he played basketball. Early in his ministry he stopped playing church-league basketball because his temper kept embarrassing him & the church. That seemed to work. A decade passed without a problem.

Then, his oldest son made the high school basketball team. He wrote, "I began living my life again through my son." Stu terrorized referees. On one occasion he was seated in the second row, but wound up on floor level with no recollection of how he got there. He received nasty letters from church members, who he says now, "were absolutely right on." But then he got another note: "Stu, I know your heart. I know that's not you. I know that you want to live for Christ and His reputation. And I know that's not what happened at these ball games. If it would be helpful to you, I'd come to the games and sit beside you." It was from a close friend named Steve, who knew and loved him. "Steve saved my life," Stu said, "It was a gracious extension of truth. He assumed the best and believed in me."

"But the fruit of the Spirit is.....gentleness" (Galatians 5:23)._There is an old song...a really old song...it comes from an old movie...a really old movie, "Beyond the Purple Hills". The song begins, "I love those dear hearts and gentle people..."

"I love those dear hearts and gentle people."

So does God!

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It reminds me of the story of the great African American singer Marian Anderson. You may not remember her because she retired from singing in 1965, but she was one of the great singers of her day. Once in an interview a reporter asked her to "name the greatest moment in her life." She could have named:

- * The night Conductor Arturo Toscanini announced, 'A voice like hers comes once in a century.'
- * In 1955 she became the first African American to sing with the Metropolitan Opera in New York.
- * The following year her autobiography became a bestseller.
- * In 1958 she became the US delegate to the United Nations.
- * She once gave a private concert at the White House for the Roosevelts, King George VI & Queen Elizabeth of England.
- * Her hometown, of Philadelphia, awarded her the \$10,000 Bok Award as the person who'd done the most for the city.
- * In 1963 she was awarded the coveted Presidential Medal of Freedom.
- * There was an Easter Sunday in Washington D. C. when she stood at the Lincoln monument and sang for a crowd of 75,000, which included Cabinet members, Supreme Court justices, and most of the members of Congress. Which of those big moments did she choose? None of them. She quietly told the reporter that the greatest moment of her life was the day she went to her mother and told her she wouldn't have to take in washing anymore. The greatness of Marian Anderson didn't merely stem from her extraordinary voice, but her gentle spirit.

In the day of the Southern Confederacy, General Robert E. Lee was severely criticized by General Whiting. It might have been expected that Lee would in time, get even with WHITING. One day President Jefferson Davis asked General Lee what he thought of General Whiting. Without hesitation Lee commended Whiting in high terms and called him one of the ablest men in the confederate army. An officer present spoke up and suggest that Lee must not know what unkind things Whiting had been saying about him. Lee answered. "I understood that the president desired to know my opinion of Whiting, not Whiting's opinion of me."

Doesn't experience itself teach this most basic lesson? This really hit home this past week when one of our young fathers was in a bad bicycle accident - breaking his pelvis and shoulder. In the blink of an eye, he went from being a young and very active hard working man - trying to get in better shape - into a man who can barely even walk with the help of a walker. He could have very easily - very easily - died in that accident. It shook him up - it shook me up - his wife up -

when you think about it - it should shake all of us up - because it was a harsh reminder to ALL of us how fragile we really are. All it takes is one wrong turn, one faulty valve, one mistake - and you could die. If God lifted His protection from you for one second - one minute I can guarantee you that the devil would torture you to death - and there is absolutely NOTHING you could do about it. Therefore, God needs to deal with us GENTLY, because if He didn't, we would die - and die quickly.

John Drescher, in his marvelous book Spirit Fruit, tells this story of the gentleness of the great evangelist D.L. Moody. Crowds came to hear him everywhere he went and on one occasion a young boy, dirty and ragged, came to the door of the large church where he was to preach. The usher at the door told him he should be home in bed, and he turned him away. The lad went to the side of the church where he was crying when Moody arrived in his carriage. He heard the boys sobs and went over and asked him what his problem was. He explained he was not allowed in to hear Moody preach. Moody smiled and said, "Do you really want to get in? I know how you can get past that big fellow at the door. Are you willing?" The lads response was a definite, "Yes, sir!"

Moody told him to hold on to his coat tails, and not let loose until he said so. Moody just walked into the church and up to the pulpit, and the little guy was right behind. He said, "Now my boy you sit here." Then he put him in his chair, where he listened to Moody preach. The pastor who told this true story said, "The reason I know it is true is because it happened in my church, and I was that little boy." Moody's gentle handling of a crisis in this boys life led him to become a full time servant of God in that very church where the kindness was shown. It Christians do not add gentleness to this world, they are part of the problem and not part of the answer.

I remember the time I was on my way to the hospital to visit someone. Her hospital stay was the consequence of sin in her life. I was wondering and praying about what to say to her.

On the way I saw a sign that read, "High Tech, Gentle Touch." That sums up the care we all want to get from our health-care professionals: in the hospital, the doctor's office, the dentist's chair, the eye doctor.

It occurred to me this is the kind of care I should be giving to the woman and her family. I am High Tech when it comes to computers and email and web-sites and Bible programs. But I also need to show a Gentle Touch.

Illust. Davon Huss tells the story of John Wesley who once had an officer, (a military officer, it seems from the story,) which made for a wonderful traveling companion. "He was brilliant and agreeable in conversation," notes Huss, "but there was one serious drawback - his profanity. When they changed vehicles, Wesley took the officer aside and, after expressing the pleasure he had enjoyed in his company, said he a great favor to ask him. The young officer replied, "I will take great pleasure in obliging you, for I am sure you will not make an unreasonable request."

"Then," said Wesley, "as we have to travel together some distance, I beg that, if I should forget myself and just start swearing, that you will kindly reprove me." The officer immediately saw the motive and felt the force of the request and smiling said, "None by Mr. Wesley could have conceived a reproof in such a manner." It worked like a charm.

Illust. Well will I remember the graciousness of a camp director that I worked with 23 years ago who showed gentleness in a moment when certainly did not feel gracious. It was the last night of this particular camp and one of my campers headed barefoot to the bathroom in the middle of the night and cut him self on a grate that is used to cover a fire pit beside the cabins where we stayed.

Seeing a pool of blood on the floor next to my bed, when he had returned and told me, "Jim, I cut my foot," I had my assistant counselor wrap the wound (he used about a ½ roll of toilet paper) while I went to get the director. Soon we were on the road, around 2 AM to the nearest hospital, about 30 minutes away. We had not gone far when Brandon asked if the stitches would hurt. "No," came the gentle reply from Reed, "they won't hurt." But what did I want to say? "Yes! Yes! Yes! They will hurt so bad that you will die! The needles are a foot long!" But I refrained. Reed's graciousness also was demonstrated when the first hospital refused treatment and we had to go to another hospital for care.