

LIVING BEYOND YOURSELF – WEEK #9  
The Fruit of the Spirit is Gentleness  
2 Timothy 2:24-25

## **JEFF**

We've been studying the Fruit of the Spirit, 9 characteristics that should be growing in the lives of those who genuinely follow Jesus. Tonight we'll explore the 8th of these 9 virtues given in Galatians 5:22-23.

By the way, just as many of you received a "word" for the year 2020 printed on a star last Epiphany, I also randomly chose a star out of the bag. And guess what my word was for this most frustrating unusually challenging year? Yep. GENTLENESS.

In a society where violence and insults are considered "entertainment" aggression and insensitivity have become the norm. Especially in the business world, where everything is directed toward productivity, competition, and profit, leaving little room for gentleness.

Jesus calls us to be in the world, but not of the world - which means that people who observe our lives should notice a difference in us. In these days of outrage and hostility, gentleness is a quality that will set believers apart and cause people who are from Christ to take notice.

Gentleness is also a quality needed for Christian service, as indicated by our reading tonight. But what is gentleness, exactly?

### **I. What Gentleness is**

Gentleness is closely related to another spiritual quality called **MEEKNESS**. In fact, in many passages they're used interchangeably.

But make no mistake, "meekness is not weakness". Meekness has to do with how one regards oneself, that is with humility and sober judgement.

**Gentleness on the other hand, deals with the way that one**

**regards others.** A gentle person is mild-mannered toward people - considerate, thoughtful, and friendly. A gentle person doesn'tt resort to using force to get things done: Titus 3:2 says, "to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people."

We're often told that this soft approach to people isn't suitable for survival in our world; that if we want to succeed, we must be aggressive and unyielding toward all competitors, refusing to give in to any of their demands or requests.

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But the truth is that gentleness is not a sign of weakness at all. It can be a most powerful tool used by God to accomplish His purposes. Proverbs 15:1 says, 'A soft (gentle) answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.'

The Bible gives us an excellent example of a king who was not gentle in dealing with his people and the result of it was that he lost most of his kingdom. According to **1 Chronicles 10:6-16**, when **Rehoboam**, the son of King Solomon came to the throne of Israel, his people requested him to ease the heavy taxation that his father had imposed on them to finance his massive building projects.

Rehoboam first asked the wise older men for their advice and they said to him, 'If you wilt be kind to this people and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants forever.' Their advice was that king Rehoboam would gain more by being gentle toward the people.

But Rehoboam didn't listen to them. Instead he listened to the advice of his younger friends who told him to be tough, saying to the people, 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. For whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will put more to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I shall chastise you with scorpions!'

King Rehoboam followed this very unwise advice and lost 10 of Israel's 12 tribes, which broke away and formed another kingdom.

Besides understanding what gentleness is, it's also important for us to clarify what gentleness is not. To be gentle is not the same as being gullible or naive. Christ told His disciples to be wise as serpents, while being harmless as doves.

We'd be foolish to let others take advantage of our gentleness, by manipulating us for their own purposes. Gentleness must always be applied with wisdom.

Even Jesus, the gentle Lamb of God, did not commit Himself to everyone who claimed to believe in Him, because He knew the true motives of everyone who came to him. (John 2:23-25).

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Also gentleness doesn't mean you should always give in to others. Whenever biblical morality is at stake, we can't afford to be swayed.

In the history of Israel there was one king who was just the opposite of Rehoboam. While Rehoboam was not gentle enough, this king was much too gentle even with the enemies of God. This king was **Jehoshaphat**. He was a good and god-fearing king, but he adopted friendly attitude toward King Ahab, who was the most wicked king of Israel.

Ahab married Jezebel the evil Sidonian princess who brought Baal worship into Israel. He persecuted the prophets of God and coveted the property of Naboth.

But in spite of all that, Jehoshaphat accepted Ahab's invitation to help him fight a battle, engaged in joint ventures with Ahab, and even had his son married off to Ahab's daughter. Of course, each of these things ended in disaster, as a prophet of God had warned:

**“Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, the wrath of the LORD is on you. (2 Chronicles 19:2)**

The point is that we learn to exercise gentleness with wisdom, standing firm on moral principles.

## **II. Our Pattern for Gentleness**

There's no example of gentleness than Jesus Himself.  
Gentleness was foretold to be one outstanding aspect of the ministry of Christ in **Isaiah 42:1-4**...

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will bring justice to the nations.  
<sup>2</sup> He will not shout or cry out,  
or raise his voice in the streets.  
<sup>3</sup> A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.  
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;  
<sup>4</sup> he will not falter or be discouraged  
till he establishes justice on earth.  
In his teaching the islands will put their hope."

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These verses from Isaiah are quoted again in Matthew 12:18-21 where they are applied to Jesus. Isaiah gives us two images - First, a cracked, half-broken reed; so fragile that it will break under rough treatment from people in the world. Yet in the hands of Jesus, the reed will not be broken, but fully restored. With Jesus, no one is beyond hope.

The second image is the flickering wick of a candle. A sudden movement will quench the light entirely. But in Christ's hands the flame will be safe and grow in strength again 'till it is able to shine its light for all to see.

According to verses 3 and 4, the gentleness of Christ is the means by which He'll one day bring forth judgment. In the end, Gentleness will prove to be more effective in subduing kingdoms than aggressive force.

In the New Testament, Jesus Himself speaks about his own gentleness. In Matthew 11:28-30 He says,  
<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus is gentle because He knows our needs and the anguish of our hearts. He understands our failures and disappointments.

He offers us rest in Him, opportunity to learn from Him, and a His yoke that is not burdensome, but easy. Can there anyone be more gentle to us than Jesus?

In Luke 19:1-10 we find the story of Zaccheaus, who is just one example of someone who discovered such rest and restoration. This rich tax-collector, who was despised by everyone, heard that Jesus was coming he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Him because he was very short. Jesus saw Zacchaeus and said to him, **“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”**

To a person like Zacchaeus who was hated by his own people, there could be no better gentleness that Jesus could show him than coming to his house and spending time with him, thereby meeting his deepest need.

### **JEFF**

The thief who was crucified beside Christ at Calvary also experienced this gentleness. Though deserving of death, he cried out to the Lord, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”** How wonderful was the gentle reply that Jesus gave to him: **‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise.’** (Luke 23:42-43)

Peter, one of Jesus’ closest disciples, also experienced this gentleness after denying Jesus three times on the night when Jesus was arrested. Peter had every reason to feel unworthy of being a disciple anymore.

In fact in John 21 Peter went back to his fishing business and it was Jesus who came to seek for him and restore him. Jesus gently gave Peter three opportunities to confess his love for Him (the same number of times that he had denied the Lord. Then Jesus recommissioned Peter to follow Him as His disciple, saying, “Feed My sheep.”

Now that we have seen our pattern for Gentleness in Jesus, we want to consider, “How we might cultivate this pattern of gentleness in our own life?”

### **III. How to Cultivate Gentleness**

A gentle spirit comes from having an accurate scriptural view of ourselves and of others. We must see ourselves as undeserving sinners, saved by grace alone.

If not for what God has done in our lives, we would not be what we are right now. We must realize how gentle and gracious God has been to us, to forgive us our sins.

When we understand how immensely we have been forgiven, and how intensely we have been loved and saved by God, then we'll be more willing to show that same forgiveness, love, and compassion to those around us and be gentle in dealing with them.

The next step to cultivate gentleness is to train our minds to regard the lives of people around us as being immeasurably precious and valuable. Like a rare, fragile piece porcelain that can't be replaced. Or the wonder of a new born baby.

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Each person you meet is created in the image of God and has been died for by Jesus Christ at Calvary. So if God considers them to be *that* precious, we would insult him not to do the same.

Having this Scriptural view of people informs how we should treat them. Gentleness means first of all, being careful not to offend, or cause them to stumble. **Ephesians 4:32** says it this way...

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Secondly, being gentle means seeking the welfare of others and be willing to see things from their point of view. When we put ourselves in their shoes, we'll be better equipped to respond to them in a helpful way.

On our own we would fail to do this for very long, because our tendency is usually to be concerned only for ourselves. But when we are filled with the Spirit, we receive grace to keep being concerned for others and to be gentle in our dealings with them. As we cultivate a gentle spirit, we will also want to ask...

#### **IV. Where we need to apply gentleness?**

We need this kind of gentleness first of all **in serving God and others**. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 "**But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother caring for her own children.**" Those who serve, whether as a Sunday School teacher, or a ministry team member or as a small group

facilitator need to cultivate gentleness, which will build people up and cultivate growth.

Secondly, we need gentleness **in dealing with our loved ones**. It's sometimes surprising and even ironic to find that people are the least gentle with the ones who are closest to them, because they tend to take them for granted, and expect too much from them. Gentleness begins at home, with those closest to us.

Thirdly, we need gentleness **in warning and rebuking others**, when they have done something wrong. According to Galatians 6:1, God's Word 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."**

We should never use a 'holier than thou' tone when we warn fellow believers about sin, but rather a tone of urgency and loving concern for their well-being and restoration.

## **JEFF**

### **AN EXAMPLE OF GENTLENESS TO FOLLOW:**

When Paul began his message to his pagan audience in Athens, he took into account their belief in many gods. He started by noting how they were very religious, and then proceeded to comment on one altar he had seen with the inscription "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." In Acts 17:23 he says, **"Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you"**.

This was a gentle way of easing people out of the idea of dozens of gods and into the idea of the true God. Even though some mocked, others asked to hear more, and some believed.

Imagine if Paul had not been gentle in this situation—if he had said, "Men of Athens! You have sinned greatly with your terrible gods! You are very ignorant about anything religious! Pray for mercy that you evil sinners may not be struck down!" Would he have had any takers? Probably not.

Gentleness is typically regarded as something that is **weak** or **nonassertive**. But when we consider that it is a result ("fruit") of God's Holy Spirit being active in our lives and that being gentle **requires the strength of self-control, thoughtfulness, tact and concern** — we see it in an entirely different way.

## How do we stay above the harshness of the angry world around us?

### Apologize quickly after “rants” or “emotional outbursts.”

We are human beings with powerful emotions and these will happen, but a gentle person will realize how the things they’ve said have affected others and will quickly apologize, seeking to make amends and to gain the self-control that will prevent such outbursts in the future. (Next week we’ll begin the first of three sessions on the final fruit of self-control).

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Another thing we can do is...

### Remind ourselves of God’s gentleness with us.

How would you want God to correct you or point something out to you?

When you see someone doing something wrong, are you quick to judge or condemn even in your own mind?  
Or are you thinking of ideas on how to help them overcome the burden of their sin?

Being gentle doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be strong in our beliefs, but it does imply that we should be wise and loving in expressing those beliefs to others.

God is always truthful and shows tough love to the wayward, all the while being the very definition of gentleness. Being made in His image means that with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can do the same.

### PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are gentle and humble in heart. Empower us this week to reflect your character in our thoughts, words, and actions. Make us walking billboards for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness as we live by the fruit of the Spirit. In your name we pray. Amen.

