

Gentleness Unleashed

Well here we are week 11 of the series. The week that you no doubt circled on the calendar when this series started. Love, Joy, Peace....all very interesting..very helpful..But you tested your gift of patience waiting for today.....Well its here.....and yes...hold on because we are finally going to talk about Gentleness. I know....You have waited...and it is finally here.

Our passage once again....

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV) 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Yep its there....gentleness. We have explored this passage every week of this series and many times before. Let me ask you this....Is this the list that you expected to see? I mean when Jesus said He would send the Helper Spirit who would teach us all things....that the Spirit would give us power....is this list the kind of power and gift that you expected?

I would have expected courage, determination, persistence, toughness, grit, willpower, fearless or boldness to make the list ahead of gentleness, kindness and goodness.

Apparently, I am not alone.

Several years ago, The Christian Researcher George Barna asked Christians to prioritize 30 characteristics of a Christian from the Bible. From one to thirty they listed them in order of importance. Those that best reflected Christ at the top....and so on down the list. Want to guess what trait was last? Gentleness...#30.

Gentleness is a Fruit of the Spirit. It is one of God's top nine and yet we rank it last. God said...you will be able to identify followers of Jesus because of 9 characteristics that reflect the time that they have spent soaking in the Holy Spirit.

Yet many of us treat gentleness like that awkward Christmas present that we get....we smile, thank them and then wonder what in the world we are going to do with it.

You rarely hear a believer pray for more gentleness. You rarely hear a believer state that they are going to surrender more to Christ so that He can make them more gentle. Gentleness is the last fruit in the basket for most of us and it gets no respect. Honestly most of us would tell Barna what others told Him. We don't associate gentleness with Godly character. We pray for more of God's power....not more of His gentleness.

Look at what King David said...

2 Samuel 22:36 - "You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your gentleness made me great."

Your gentleness....gentleness....made me....great? What?

Perception Problem

The problem with the Spiritual Gift of Gentleness is that we think that gentleness and weakness are the same thing. When we hear gentleness we associate it with being passive, wimpy, helpless, and weak. Losers are gentle and weak, winners are tough and powerful.

In Western Civilization gentleness equals failure. Gentle people are weak. Weak people fail. "Only the Strong Survive"

I have never seen a superhero who boasted that they were full of Gentleness.....Never have I seen Captain Gentle save the world by zapping people with bolts that caress their feelings.

Yet God told us that the Holy Spirit will empower us and that one way this power will be revealed on earth is through the supernatural fruit of Gentleness. Interesting that Jesus said we would receive power and yet none of the fruits of the Spirit seem to align with our idea of being powerful.

We don't think about powering up by saying...just wait I am about to blast you with joy, patience, kindness and gentleness.....take them apples. We don't picture our enemies saying "Oh please not that!" Anything but being doused with gentleness...or love. Yet Jesus said....I am giving your powerful gifts from Heaven...you go drop love bombs.

It is important to understand. We think of gifts from God in the terms of our life right now. I need courage, boldness, toughness....not gentleness and kindness. And those are important human traits to have on earth....

But we are no longer about earth. We are spiritual beings, fighting in the spiritual realm, fighting for principles and truths that are eternal. The power Jesus promised when the Holy Spirit arrived was not human power....it was Gods power....for eternal spiritual purposes.

Acts 1:8 (NIV) 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Once empowered, we become God's Witnesses on Earth for spiritual things. We reflect Jesus and He is love, joy, peace, patience.....gentleness.

So if Gentleness, aka meekness, and Weakness are not the same thing....then what is gentleness?

The Greek word for **gentleness comes from two words—prautēs and epieikēs**. Prautēs means humility, considerateness, meekness. It usually refers to things, objects, or people—words that are gentle, soothing medicine, soothing actions, soothing feelings. This word might refer to tame animals or charitable and generous people. Prautēs is something you expect from your friends and those who love you.

Epieikēs is a word used to express a balanced, intelligent, decent outlook on life—a good citizen, an admired person, a trusted individual—these all fall under the heading of epieikēs. Plato called this the cement of society. So the Greeks defined gentleness as power **(PHOTO 1)** under control, and their word picture was that of a horse that had been tamed. You see, gentleness was to them a powerful animal whose passion and power was fully and completely under control. **(PHOTO 2)**

So when the Greeks thought of gentleness.....the image is one of a wild stallion that is now working in complete concert with its rider. They are a team and the power of the animal is harnessed and focused for the purpose of the rider.

It is definitely not the same picture as an old weak, wimpy horse out to pasture. **(PHOTO 3)**

In fact, it takes strength and power to be gentle.

Gentleness is power under control. A gentle person is someone who has all the power they need but they choose not to use it. Truth be told, it takes a strong person to truly be gentle.

I spend most of my waking hours at home playing tug of war with one of our dogs. **PHOTO 4** I can hold one end of the rope while working on the computer, doing my bible study, or watching tv.

Marge pulls as hard as she can....makes all kinds of noises...grunts....shakes her head....she is all in with everything she has. Her power is at times maxed out. **PHOTO 5**

I have enough power to pick her up by the rope and throw her across the room. Often I forget that we are in a tug of war. Holding the rope at times takes so little effort on my part that I forget what I am doing until she shakes her head or growls.

Because of my relative strength....I am playing gently with her. If we were equally matched you would never see gentleness. Only the powerful can be gentle. Gentle is not a sign of weakness but rather the evidence of strength.

Gentleness is harnessed strength. It is a strong hand with a gentle touch.

Weak people can't be gentle...they can only be weak. Powerful people can't be weak but they can be gentle.

So you know what is interesting about wild stallions? They never go backwards. Once they are broken, once they are tamed, they never go back to being wild again.

It is not that they decide each day to be a horse under control....their very nature changed when they were broken. They can't go back and be wild like they were before. They are stallions with all of the power that they had before but their nature has changed. They have become gentle giants. Now under the guidance and working in sync with their rider.

We as fallen humans are born like wild stallions. We don't realize it because all of us have the same condition. We live with sinful desires and selfish motives. We want what we want and we will do what is necessary to get it.

In our fallen sinful state, man uses power for the preservation and protection of himself and perhaps those he cares about. It is the survival of the fittest. Sinful people worship themselves and leverage whatever influence or power they can obtain for themselves. Sinful people are inherently selfish. They live in a "me first" world.

In civilized society we try to downplay these animal instincts. But let societal norms or restraints fall away even for just a few days....and it comes out. Limit food, water or electricity for a few weeks and watch what happens to society.

We have the power to use our words to hurt and manipulate others. Each of us can and have acted in ways that hurt other people. We can tone it down a bit and not show our selfish animal instincts to others...but they are there....we are at the core animals focused on our survival.

We are all wild stallions....daring someone to try to tame us. Yet for those who surrender to Jesus....who receive the Holy Spirit....become transformed....as we abide in the Holy Spirit...we find our wild stallion selfish nature being replaced with...well dare I say it....gentleness. We become sweetly broken...wholly surrendered.

Like the Stallion, we still have the power to hurt people through our words and actions....but we no longer have the desire. Our very nature has changed and we can't go back.

Gentleness is from the Spirit because it takes the Spirit of God to harness the power of sinful people. We are as fallen humans incredibly powerful when it comes to sin and hurting others.

Gentleness....God's Gentleness....is a gift from Heaven to those who abide. It takes God's Spirit to tame the wild sinful human. The Holy Spirit changes from animals trying to survive and the expense of others to spiritual beings naturally being gentle.

Notice that I did not say that you choose to be gentle. Spiritual gifts manifest themselves naturally. What you discover is that you are now a gentle person. Not a wild stallion that is choosing to be gentle in the moment. It is as natural for you to be gentle as it was for you to be wild. You have become someone new....someone Spiritual and that new person is gentle.

It is our gentleness that becomes evidence of a heart that is now in sync with its master. When you see someone riding a stallion....you know that the rider is working in sync and is in control of that animal for His or Her purposes. That huge animal looks so beautiful...so tame....so....well gentle.

When people see your walk with Jesus....and they see your gentle spirit...they know that God is in control of your life...that you are in sync with the purposes of your Master...and your old sin nature- the wild selfishness and pride- are gone....they see restrained power....they see God's gentle Spirit in you.

Gentleness is a character which directly links us to Jesus Christ.

True followers of Christ are distinguished by gentleness.

Gentleness is so unnatural in our world that it's demonstration points people to Jesus. Jesus said....

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV) 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am

"strong, powerful, and invincible...." No...that is not what Jesus says. He says when you are so overwhelmed and burdened...you should the weight of your burdens upon Him because....He is gentle.

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV) 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Knowing what gentle means opens up what Jesus is saying here. Jesus says...I am gentle....I have all the power and resources of God. I am barely using them right now. I have so many reserves available. You are like Marge using all your strength and you are worn out. I am gentle...barely breaking a sweat....I got this...give it to me...I am restrained unlimited power. My burden is easy...my yoke is light.

True followers have given their burdens to Christ and others see it. They see their gentleness and they know it is not from them.

1 Peter 3:4 - "But let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious."

Peter knows a thing or two about the Gentleness of Christ. Note that the gentle and quiet Spirit is a hidden person of the heart....a secret weapon...Adorn yourself with gentleness....Why? Because others are watching.

Our gentleness is a powerful Spiritual fruit used to reach those who don't yet believe....Paul knew that is was a powerful gift in the hands of Almighty God.

Philippians 4:5 - "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

Genuine gentleness as led by God demands that no harm be done. There are safe ways to demonstrate our boldness for what is right without necessarily using violence. There are also non-manipulative ways to lead and convince others to go after what is right.

Titus 3:2 – “To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”

We can stand for God with a gentle spirit and not condone sin. We can disagree with others and still show respect and gentleness. In fact, only by knowing in our heart of hearts that God is right...can we disagree with gentleness. That is the power....the Power of the Holy Spirit...that allows us to be gentle. Being gentle is about Spirit-control, no longer desiring to use power to harm anyone, no desire to embrace vengeance, and no desire to cut and slash at others.

Gentleness has to do with being humble and thankful to God, it manifests as being polite and showing a restrained behavior towards others. As we have said, it takes a strong person to be truly gentle.

When we are filled with the Spirit's fruit of gentleness, we will correct others with easiness instead of arguing in resentment and anger, knowing that their salvation is far more important than our pride

Colossians 4:5-6 – “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

We will forgive readily, because any offense toward us is nothing compared to our offenses against God—offenses He's already forgiven

Gentleness also means giving up the right to judge what is best for ourselves and others. God is not as concerned with our comfort as He is concerned with our spiritual growth, and He knows how to grow us far better than we do.

Gentleness means that we accept that the rain falls on the evil and the just and that God may use methods we don't like to reach our hearts and the hearts of others.

Gentleness means that we have come to accept and embrace God's truth. This was a big one for me. I discovered that one of the obstacles I have to gentleness is that I always felt that I had to prove to others that what God says is true.

So I would get all amped up and invested in proving that I was right. I could win the battle and lose the war. Then one day I realized that God didn't need me to defend His truth. It wasn't at all about His truth. His truth is true no matter what people think about it.

The question was could I point people to God's truth in a manner of gentleness that draws them to learn more? Is my gentleness evident?

2 Timothy 2:24-26 – “And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”

A spirit of gentleness toward God is to accept His judgment on people and issues. We tend to think it is gentle to go easy on people and try to justify actions that God has called sin. Or to let someone continue in sin without speaking the truth. We are to always speak God's truth to others. Gentleness doesn't mean that we ignore sin...that is what weakness means. We are to go full bore in on God's truth and not back down or compromise....but....there is one key caveat....

Galatians 6:1 (NIV) 1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.

This doesn't mean to be so soft that the sinner doesn't realize he's sinned. It means to confront the brother in a manner that is in line with Scripture—to be mild, loving, encouraging, and clear about the holiness that God calls us to.

Also notice that only those who LIVE by the Spirit can do this. Gentleness seems to be a "late fruit to grow"

It is interesting how the Spiritual fruits seem to interrelate. As our love for others grows, so does our patience, kindness and gentleness. Gentleness is rare because it seems to come last in the Spiritual growth process. Gentleness is the sign of a mature believer.

Ephesians 4:2 – "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,"

It is almost as if we need to grow enough of God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness.....before we begin to exhibit His gentleness. I think Gentleness is a mature fruit seen only in the most mature believers.

Puritan leader Jonathan Edwards said, "All who are truly godly and are real disciples of Christ have a gentle spirit in them."

Gentleness flows from Supernatural Love. As we love others like Christ loves them, we find our gentle nature becoming more evident.

1 Peter 3:15 – "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,"

Our gentleness is not only evident when seen by an unbelieving world....it is a key component of our relationship with the Spirit and each other as believers.

God's Truth is Inherently Gentle

James 3:17 – "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."

To receive God's Truth we must be gentle.

James 1:21 – "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

The Gentleness of Christ should motivate us for one another

2 Corinthians 10:1 – "I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—"

Gentleness allows us to speak truth to one another.

Galatians 6:1 (NIV) 1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.

We are to pursue gentleness in the same manner that we pursue godliness, love and righteousness.

1 Timothy 6:11 – “But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”

We are to wear God's Gentleness each day

Colossians 3:12 – “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Even our adornments our accessories should reflect the Gentleness of God.

1 Peter 3:4 – “But let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.”

Now that we have a better understanding of gentleness...we see it in everything Jesus did. If there is one characteristic of Christ other than love that stands out it is that of restrained power.....gentleness. Jesus had the power to do anything. He literally holds creation together in his hands.

Colossians 1:15–20 (ESV) 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

You see you can't really understand someone's gentleness unless you fully grasp their strength. Jesus is God and He said if you have seen me you have seen the Father. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. There is nothing that He cannot do.

Jeremiah 32:26–27 (ESV) 26 The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 27 “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?”

Jesus understood the power available to Him at all times.

Matthew 26:53 (ESV) 53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

Think about all of the power of God. Think about the mission of Jesus with all of that power available to Him on earth....He came on a mission...a mission to show the gentleness of God in order to inspire people to restore their relationship with Him.

Philippians 2:4–8 (ESV) 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Think about almost any event in Jesus life and you see His gentleness....Restrained Power.

In the fourth chapter of John, Jesus encounters the woman at the well. This is the woman who was married five times and is now living with a man who isn't her husband, and she's a Samaritan, one of the despised ones. Not the kind of person you want to be associated with. Jesus asks her for a drink of water, and her response isn't all that kind, yet Jesus responds gently. Why? Is he afraid of her? Is he afraid someone might see them together? Or worse yet, is he afraid that she may leave and tell people that Jesus spoke to her? No. He responded gently because he saw beyond her reputation. He saw a thirsty and needy person. He saw a person who needed his living water. He saw a person who needed restoration, and with gentleness, he restored her.

Then Jesus encountered the woman caught in adultery in John 8. Those who caught her were salivating. They could feel those smooth stones in their hands and were poised to stone her to death; they could hardly wait. Did Jesus join them? Did he pick up a stone and join the crowd? No. Using his finger he wrote in the sand, and when he was finished, they were all gone. Just the woman was there. Jesus looked at her and said, "There's no one here to condemn you. I don't condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." Clearly she was guilty. Jesus knew that, but he saw beyond her reputation. He saw a person who needed to be restored, and with gentleness he restored her.

Then in Luke 19, we read the story of Jesus and that wee little man in the tree, Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus—the hated tax collector, rich because he took money from other people, absolutely despised by everyone. Does Jesus, upon seeing Zacchaeus, point his finger at him and accuse him of being the thief he really is? No. Jesus looks up, points to him, and says, "Zacchaeus, come down from that tree. I'm coming to your house for dinner tonight." Jesus saw beyond Zacchaeus' reputation. He saw a man who needed to be restored, and with gentleness he restored him.

Now picture this scene from Luke 2. Martha, a friend of Jesus, had invited him and his disciples over for dinner. Lots of preparation needed to go into this meal. So picture Jesus in the living room, Mary—Martha's sister—sitting at his feet, and twelve disciples sitting with him. It's a beautiful scene: Jesus is teaching, and Martha's in the kitchen. All Luke says is that Martha was in the kitchen then she came out. Between Martha in the kitchen and the word then, I'm guessing there was some banging of pans, slamming of cabinet doors, some heavy sighs, all in hopes that Jesus might come in and say, "Can I help you? Is something wrong?" But Martha gets all worked up, comes out, stands in front of Jesus, hands on her hips, and says, "Tell my sister to help me." Face to face with his friend Martha, Jesus could have rebuked her. She deserved it, didn't she? Instead, he says, "Martha, Martha." Two times he calls her name in a tone of endearment. He saw beyond her frustration. He saw beyond her anger. He saw beyond her jealousy. He saw a woman who needed to be restored, and he restored her.

In Matthew 8 we read of Jesus meeting a man with leprosy. He had the power to heal Him and He did. But it was in his gentleness that He reached out and touched him. Lepers hadn't felt human touch in a very long time. His touch...His gentleness in the moment...incredible.

In Mark 5 We read of Jesus' encounter with a hemorrhagic woman. She reached to Him in desperation just trying to touch a tassel and He stopped, turned to her, didn't rebuke her but instead....healed her with gentleness.

Some of Jesus' greatest examples of gentleness are in the restrained power that He showed to the Pharisees, Priests, and Teachers of the Law. They were constantly daring Him, threatening Him, opposing Him and trying to set Him up. Yet He never unleashed His power. I would have zapped them. Jesus models for us....the gentleness that we are to show our enemies. They called Him every name in the book. They said He was from Satan, a bastard child, a blasphemer, a fraud...and Jesus left judgment and retaliation to the Father.

I could go on forever on this. The gentleness that Jesus shows Mary Magdalen on the Morning of His resurrection. The Gentleness Jesus shows Mary as He casts out her demons.

The restrained power...the gentleness that Jesus shows when Peter denies Him and Jesus asks Him 3 times...Do you love me?

Everything Jesus did on earth reflected His gentleness. It is truly one of the greatest characteristics of Jesus and of His followers.

His gentleness with Mary after His resurrection....Restoring Peter....Do you love me?,,,The men on the way to Emmaus.

You might be thinking....well ok...but He is God. Jesus has a power that I will never have. I can't show gentleness to other people. They will destroy me.

Let me remind you of what Jesus promised. You will receive POWER when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. What kind of power does God give us?

The Power of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness.... and gentleness. Go out into the world and zap them with God's gentleness.

Gentleness, I believe, is one of the most powerful and most effective gifts that God gives us in the Spirit. It is seen only in the most mature believers because I believe that the consequences of its expression bring out full opposition to God. Gentleness is not for the Spiritually immature or weak of heart. It is saved for spiritual warriors.

Take God's gentleness into the world and they will do to you what they did to Jesus. They lie about you, try to discredit you, try to arrest you, carry you away, say your mad, call you names, challenge your motives, threaten your integrity, take away your job, turn your family against you, try to twist your words against you, ruin your reputation, attack you, beat you, torture you, kill you? You know that is what we signed up for right? Jesus told us that they would hate us because they first hated Him. That we were to connect with Him through our suffering.

Luke 6:22-23 (ESV) 22 "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! 23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

So we have been through in detail each of the Spiritual Fruits. Can you imagine a believer not wanting all of them fully manifested in their lives? It happens all the time. Many who trust Jesus for their salvation don't fully trust Jesus in their growth. Growing up Spiritually will begin to cost you relationships, friends and public approval.

It takes a very Spiritually strong person to be truly gentle. Some will see the Spiritual fruit of Gentleness in you and be drawn to Jesus. God's Gentleness flowing through you will stand in stark contrast to the harshness of this world. God's gentleness will melt their resistance.

Others will see the Spiritual Fruit of Gentleness in you and hate you for it. Gentleness is so powerful Satan always seems to attack it. Jesus warned us that spiritual maturity is not for the faint of heart

John 15:18-21 (ESV) 18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

Many believers stop abiding and stop growing Spiritual fruit because of the resistance that they get from their friends, family and coworkers. As they abide in Christ they begin to see people turn away from them....they so desperately want the approval of others that they tone the Jesus stuff down.

They don't realize that their friends, family and coworkers are rejecting Jesus..not them. But as they abide it becomes harder and harder to see you separate from Jesus. The more you abide in Christ the more you find yourself isolated from those who reject Him.

Even believers who don't want to grow deeper will isolate you. Too many followers of Jesus stagnate because it starts to cost them something and they just cant go there. Sadly not all believers truly want all the fruit fully manifested in their lives and Satan will try to use them to get you to stagnate as well.

Surround yourself with people in your core group who want every Spiritual Fruit fully manifested in their lives and in your life. Don't settle for less than God's best. Not every believer abides in Christ or has a desire to grow spiritually. Paul called them taking milk when they should have been on solid food.

Walking this planet....looking more and more like Jesus is going to cause you to be rejected. Embrace it...celebrate it...rejoice and leap for Joy...your reward will be great in heaven.

You have to decide if you are all in. You have to decide to abide in Christ every day no matter what happens. You must decide that if God wants to give something to you that you want all of it. Spiritually mature people are not naive. They know the true cost and they know the true reward. They are strong and because of that they are gentle. Let's pray.