

Gentleness

Purpose: To understand what the fruit of gentleness means and to inspire us to allow the Holy Spirit to develop it in our daily lives.

Objective: By the end of the lesson the students will:

1. Know what gentleness means.
2. Value gentleness more deeply in their lives.
3. Trust the Holy Spirit to develop gentleness in their daily lives.

Key Verse: Matthew 11:29

I. Introduction

The last set of three of the fruit of the Spirit focus on who we are internally as a person. Faithfulness looked at my dependability in a task. Gentleness focuses on my disposition toward unlovely people.

At this time tell a story of a meek or gentle person. Be sure that it highlights the person's disposition towards someone unlovely. Another introduction would be to ask the students if they know of a person whom they would describe as gentle. If they do, ask them to describe that person.

II. What does Gentleness Mean?

Remember what words Jesus used to describe the Scribes and Pharisees? He called them hypocrites and blind guides of the blind. Remember His actions in relation to the Syrophenician woman. He basically ignored her. In our culture you would say that He insulted her. Then, there is the time when Jesus pronounces all the “woes” on the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:13ff). With these incidents in mind, would you call Jesus a gentle person? It doesn't sound like it. But in Matthew 11:28-29 He describes Himself as a gentle person. How can this be true? Well, part of our problem stems from our misunderstanding of the meaning of gentleness.

Gentleness comes from a Greek word that is actually better translated meekness. Meek and meekness, however, have a bad connotation in English referring to someone who is a doormat, without a spine; thus the translation, gentle(ness). The concrete use of the Greek word describes the taming of something wild and powerful, e.g., a horse, and making it useful. Horses are neither spineless or wimpy. They are powerful, but the wildness has been brought under control. That is a good description of a meek or gentle person. Though he has the power to act capriciously, he instead chooses to act with kindness, lenience, compassion. A meek person acts this way because he has an accurate appraisal of himself and is not in need of another's affirmation. Thus, he can ignore negative opinions or actions toward himself. He is not vindictive or self-justifying. He is free to act nobly without the need to have others approve of his actions. A gentle, or meek person is one who does not return evil for evil, or insult for insult, but rather gives a blessing to those who have hurt him (1 Peter 3:9).

Gentleness is the disposition behind kindness. Together, they balance justice. The opposite of gentleness is an attitude which demands that rights, including one's own, should be upheld at all costs, and can be expressed in unbridled anger, harshness, brutality or self-expression.

Gentleness is one of the outstanding features Jesus used in describing his own heart. He called those who were weary and heavy laden to come to him, take his yoke and learn from him for he is **gentle** and humble in heart according to Matthew 11:29. How has Jesus treated you gently? *(If there is time, get the student's ideas.)*

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey is foretold in prophecy, "behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey." Matthew 21:5 Even the King of the Universe is unashamed to show gentleness before his subjects. The King of Kings did not need pomp and circumstance. He knew who He was.

III. The Time for Gentleness

(Ask individuals to read these passages or divide the group into 4 small groups to look up each of the passages and ask them to discover how the fruit of gentleness is to be shown.)

1. Defending the faith. I Peter 3:15
2. Sharing Christ with others we hope to win. II Timothy 2:24-26
3. Restoring a brother. Galatians 6:1
4. Showing forbearance to one another. Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12-13.

Each of these areas has something to do with having a non-pugnacious spirit with those who are in opposition to the Gospel and is contrasted with disrespect, quarreling, and judging.

Let's get back to Jesus. Was He really a gentle person? How can we tell? *(Get some ideas from the students. Some of the answers might be how people flocked to Him. Sinners and prostitutes would never come to a harsh, condemning person. But those are the people who flocked to Jesus. Jesus was firm but gentle. People were not afraid to ask Him questions or approach Him. He demonstrated gentleness but was very firm when the occasion called for firmness.)*

What is the opposite of being gentle? It is being harsh and condemning. *(This illustration or another one can be used to demonstrate the danger of not being gentle but instead being harsh and condemning.)* At a school carnival, some kids won four free goldfish, so out they went Saturday morning to find an aquarium. The first few were price ranged from \$40 to \$70. Then dad spotted it--right in the aisle: a discarded 10-gallon display tank, complete with gravel and filter--for a mere five bucks. Sold! Of course, it was nasty dirty, but the savings made the two hours of clean-up a breeze.

Those four new fish looked great in their new home, at least for the first day. But by Sunday one had died. Too bad, but three remained. Monday morning revealed a second casualty, and by Monday night a third goldfish had gone belly up. An expert was called in. It didn't take him long to discover the problem: the tank was washed with soap, an absolute no-no. The father's uninformed efforts had destroyed the very lives he was trying to protect.

Sometimes in our zeal to clean up our own lives or the lives of others, we unfortunately use "killer soaps"--condemnation, criticism, nagging, fits of temper. We think we're doing right, but our harsh, self-righteous treatment is more than they can bear. Richard L. Dunagin

IV. Conclusion

Gentleness is a virtue in great demand today. God desires this virtue be found in us. In our vindictive, "I have a right" world, gentleness would shine as a beacon. It would certainly set us apart as one of Christ's disciples. Are you exhibiting gentleness in your relationship to others, both with non-Christians as well as our brothers and sisters in Christ? To those who challenge the reason for the hope within us? To those with whom we attempt to share Christ? To our brothers and sisters who have erred? How does this relate to our sharing Christ one-on-one or in our ministry context, conducting Bible studies, discipleship groups? Would the fruit of gentleness make you more effective in sharing Christ with others?

V. Application

Take a few minutes right now and write these four words in the four quadrants of a piece of paper: family, friends, associates, neighbors.

Think of specific individuals in each category.

Then ask yourself: "Do I have an attitude of gentleness toward each of these people?" If not, list those people and ask yourself why you do not have an attitude of gentleness toward them. Is there some wrong thought that you have in your heart regarding this person?

Finally, confess your sin in this area and ask the Holy Spirit to create in you an attitude of gentleness in your life toward them.