

Lesson Eight

Gentleness

Introduction

Aristotle (died 322 B.C.) said of the Greek word for gentleness or meekness, “[It is] the ability to bear reproaches and slights with moderation, and not to embark on revenge quickly, and not to be easily provoked to anger, but to be free from bitterness and contentiousness, having tranquility and stability in the spirit” (*On Virtues and Vices*).

What he didn’t say was that this word also implies that a meek person has the power to act in other ways—for example, a king who could take swift revenge, but who chooses to act in gentleness.

Studying God’s Word

When God shows sensitivity in dealing with us, we experience his gentleness. But gentleness can be mistaken for cowardice or a lack of power. Let’s explore how God’s gentleness and the gentleness the Spirit gives us as his gift demonstrate only bravery and strength of character.

Ideal Gentleness

1. Read Isaiah 40:10-26. Note how God is described in verses 10,12-26. How does that compare with the way he is described in verse 11?

Isaiah 40:10-26

¹⁰ *See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm.
See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.*

¹¹ *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.*

¹² *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off
the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the
scales and the hills in a balance?*

¹³ *Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor?*

¹⁴ *Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that
taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding?*

¹⁵ *Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs
the islands as though they were fine dust.*

¹⁶ *Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.*

¹⁷ *Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than
nothing.*

¹⁸ *With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?*

¹⁹ *As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver
chains for it.*

²⁰ *A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot; they look for a
skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple.*

²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

²⁵ “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

2. Jesus demonstrated both strength and gentleness. He had infinite power, but he lived out his beatitude promise, “*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5:5). How do the following passages show strength and gentleness coexisting in Jesus?

Matthew 11:28-29

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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 21:1-9

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ “Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

3. Though Jesus was perfectly gentle, he was also capable of intense anger (consider Jesus’ driving the merchants from the temple and his calling the Pharisees “whitewashed tombs,” Matthew 23:27). What is the relationship between gentleness and anger? What impact does that relationship between gentleness and anger have on God’s dealings with human beings?

His Word in My Life

The Spirit's gentleness demonstrates his sensitivity to our needs. He has the power and right to deal with us in pure justice, but he chooses forgiveness over revenge, peace over bitterness, and tranquility over angry uproar.

1. Evaluate: It takes more strength of character to be gentle with those who disagree than to bully them into doing things your way.
2. List several Bible stories in which God's gentleness especially shines through.

Studying God's Word

Living Out the Spirit's Gentleness

Now we turn our attention to the ways we demonstrate the Spirit's gentleness.

Read 1 Peter 3:1-7.

¹ *Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. ⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

1. Peter says that a key component to Christian marriage is gentleness (verses 4 and 7). Develop a list of ways gentleness will show itself between husbands and wives.
2. All of our relationships with people are to be characterized by gentleness. Read Philippians 2:1-8. What role does humility play in living out the Spirit's gentleness? Note the reason we will treat others with humble gentleness.

Philippians 2:1-8

¹ *Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

⁵ *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

⁶ *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

His Word in My Life

Moved by his grace, we are empowered by God to live in gentleness, that is “*in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left*” (2 Corinthians 6:6,7).

1. Evaluate: Gentleness is impossible without humility.
2. Agree or disagree: A Christian will show his gentleness through proper manners, politeness, and courteous behavior.
3. Read Ephesians 4:2: “*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*” What advice do you find here about dealing with annoying people?
4. Agree or disagree: Gentleness is a trait that is not valued in society today.

Summary

In our culture, *gentleness* can have a negative connotation. It can imply wimpiness, timidity, or gutlessness. But that is not the Bible’s meaning of *gentleness*. The Spirit’s brand of gentleness requires much more courage and fearlessness than any macho show of strength. Christian gentleness suffers injustice wisely and willingly if in doing so another will be helped. It seeks to be sensitive to others’ needs, to understand their view of life, and to respond in caring ways. Even though it has the power to mete out justice, it prefers to pour on the love. The compelling reason for such unnatural actions and attitudes is the forgiving gentleness that has come to us in Jesus.