This morning, I am in the eighth week of a sermon series that I've entitled "The Spirit-Formed Life." During this series, I will be looking at what is known as the fruit of the Spirit, a phrase Paul uses in Galatians 5:22 to describe the kind of character that is formed in the person who lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit, walking not according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit of God. In case you're unfamiliar with the concept of the fruit of the Spirit, it comes from Paul's words in Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control.

This, Paul says, is what the Spirit produces in the life of the person who walks in step with God's Holy Spirit. People marked by love, not hatred, hostility or indifference. Joy, not despair or cheap thrill-seeking. Peace, not anxiety or conflict. Forbearance or patience, not anger, irritability, or impatience. Kindness instead of meanness, callousness or cruelty. Goodness instead of selfishness, corruption, or perpetrating evil. Faithfulness instead of faithlessness, unreliability, or a lack of integrity. Gentleness instead of harshness, abusiveness, or aggression. And self-control instead of living a chaotic, out of control life enslaved to desires. And Paul tells us that these qualities will be ours in increasing measure as we learn to walk with the Holy Spirit of God and to yield ourselves in obedience to His fruit-producing work in our lives. That is the Spirit-formed life.

This morning, we will be looking at the eighth characteristics on the list: gentleness. The Greek word used here, prautes, translates in various places as gentleness, meekness, or humility. It is the opposite of being harsh with people. Since the fruit of the Spirit is about the life of Jesus being formed in us, we need to first understand what gentleness looks like in Jesus:

1) The gentleness, meekness, and humility of Jesus

Meekness is a very misunderstood word, probably because it rhymes with weakness. When most people hear meek and mild, they think of a timid, fearful person. But the connotation of meekness is very different; it is strength under control, like a trained warhorse, a powerful wild animal that is now submissive and receptive to the rider. In other words, by calling Jesus gentle, meek, or humble, we are not saying that he is not fully capable of destroying in an instant whoever he wants, or bringing His wrath upon people. It means that His considerable strength has been harnessed for a greater purpose, to save those that He loves.

Look at the idea of strength under control in the following passages. Consider how Paul put it:

Philippians 2:5–8 - 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!

Or how Peter put it:

2 Peter 3:8–10 - But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. [9] The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. [10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Or think about what Jesus said when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, after Peter took out a sword and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest:

Matthew 26:52–54 - "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. [53] Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? [54] But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

So when we talk about gentleness, meekness, and humility as a fruit of the Spirit, as a characteristic of Jesus and His followers, do not mistake it for weakness. It is not timidity or cowardice. It is quite the opposite; it is strength under control. It is submitting power to a greater purpose, to the will of God and the salvation of others.

With that in mind, consider the gentleness of Jesus towards us, that your heart might be transformed. Do you know that there is only one place in the gospels where Jesus tells us what His heart is like? It's in **Matthew 11:28-30**:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

At the very heart of who Jesus is, He says that He is gentle and lowly in heart. In other words, the eternal Son of God, the name above all names, the glorious, holy and sinless one, is extremely, shockingly accessible to us. He is approachable. Once again, not because He does not have the right and power to judge and destroy, but because He chooses instead to love and save. He invites us to Him to find not judgment and condemnation but rest for our souls. In fact, the Syriac NT translates gentle in this passage as “restful” – for I am restful. The implication is that people were often restful or at ease in Jesus’ presence.

Throughout the gospels, you see His compassion on display again and again towards the beaten, broken, and downtrodden who come to Him.

Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus with Mary:

John 11:33–36 - When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.
[34] “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.
[35] Jesus wept. [36] Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

Matthew 8:2–3 - A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” [3] Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.

Matthew 9:20–22 - Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. [21] She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” [22] Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.

John 8:10–11 - Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” [11] “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Listen to Dane Ortlund’s words from his book “Gentle and Lowly”:

"This is deeper than saying Jesus is loving or merciful or gracious. The cumulative testimony of the four Gospels is that when Jesus Christ sees the fallenness of the world all about him, his deepest impulse, his most natural instinct, is to move toward that sin and suffering, not away from it… When Jesus, the Clean One, touched an unclean sinner, Christ did not become unclean. The sinner became clean. Jesus Christ's earthly ministry was one of giving back to undeserving sinners their humanity."

Or, as Jesus put it:

John 6:37 - All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

And lest you think this is only Jesus, that Jesus is gentle and meek while the Father is wrathful, remember that Jesus reveals to us the gentle heart of the Father:

Luke 15:20–24 - So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. [21] "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' [22] "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. [23] Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. [24] For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

The Father had every right to punish the child, and yet he was gentle and meek with him, submitting his power to the greater purpose of saving His son.

Do you believe that your God is gentle, meek, and humble? That His considerable strength has been harnessed towards a greater purpose of saving, steadfast love? Let that encourage you to come boldly before the high and holy one.

Hebrews 4:15–16 - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. [16] Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Remember once again how God describes Himself to Moses:

Exodus 34:6–7 - And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, [7] maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

He begins by telling Moses how compassionate and gracious he is, how slow he is to anger, how he abounds in love and faithfulness and forgiveness. And remember how God describes himself in Isaiah:

Isaiah 40:10–11 - 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.

Notice that His gentleness is strength under control. Despite His considerable power, he submits that to the greater mission of saving those He loves:

Psalm 23:2–3 - He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, [3] he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.

Psalm 103:13–14 - As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; [14] for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

And, in a description of Jesus, the Messiah:

Isaiah 42:3 - A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

2) Our gentleness, meekness and humility with others

In the light of God’s example of gentleness, meekness, and humility in Jesus, what does the fruit of gentleness look like in us? Let this be a mirror to you; where do you need to confess and repent of your harshness of cowardice and yield to the Holy Spirit?

Treat people with consideration and respect

Ephesians 4:1–2 - As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. [2] Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. You have been saved by one who was and has always been gentle with you, patient with you, not treating you as your sins deserve or as He is capable of doing with His holy justice. Bearing with one another is a reminder that we are all unfinished works in progress who need patience. We are called to be completely humble and gentle with one another, not to unleash our wrath on them.

Titus 3:1–2 - Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, [2] to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

It is like handling crystal, which is valuable but fragile. This is how Billy Graham defined gentleness: "A mildness in dealing with others… It displays a sensitive regard for others and is careful never to be unfeeling for the rights of others."

Make others feel at ease, demonstrate respect for their personal dignity, don't degrade or belittle them. Do not be harsh, but control your tongue.

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

R.C. Sproul talks about how the characteristics most often sought of husbands in the marriage classes his church teaches is a combination of toughness and tenderness. It is this meekness; strength with self-control. It is not timidity or cowardice. It is not a false humility or gentleness, but one that is the fruit of God's Spirit in us.

<u>Disagree respectfully</u>

It's related to the first point, but deserves its own because of today's culture, especially online.

2 Timothy 2:24–25 - And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. [25] Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth

1 Peter 3:15 - But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect

Notice the emphasis on gentleness and respect. As believers, we don't avoid confrontation, but we don't enjoy it either. We aren't haughty, telling people what is wrong with them.

<u>Move compassionately towards the hurting and sinful</u>

Follow the example of Jesus, whose gentleness and meekness was not just a response to others but also caused him to move towards the hurting in order to love them.

2 Corinthians 1:3–4 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, [4] who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

He would not break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick. He was compassionate towards the hurting, the broken, the beaten down.

Romans 12:15 - Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

And we also move compassionately towards those who are caught in sin:

Galatians 6:1 - 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 are not afraid of confrontation or ministry, because by His Spirit we are strong and bold, but because our strength is under control, submissive to the greater purpose of seeing those whom God loves saved and perfect in His sight, we go to them gently.

Remember what God says about Himself:

Isaiah 57:15 - For this is what the high and exalted One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one

who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Although He is the holy and just one, the all-powerful one with the right and ability to judge and condemn any of us, by God's grace He has subordinated that right to His mission of saving those He loves. Let us repent of our harshness and timidity this morning and ask His Spirit to produce in us His gentleness, His meekness, His humility, His under-control strength.