

Gentleness is perhaps the most misunderstood of all the virtues listed in the Fruit of the Spirit. One of the main reasons is because Gentleness is so contrary to our culture. We live in a world of pride, power, and prestige. If you want to get to the top then you have to fight for it. Shows of strength and force are important – not gentleness. Why? For a lot of us, when we read gentleness we almost automatically insert the word "weakness" in our minds. Some of us probably would like to think that Paul made a typo when he was writing Galatians and included this on the list. But he didn't. It's supposed to be there. We have to remember that if we want to follow Jesus, we will have to go against some of the dominant themes of our culture. The list of the Fruit of the Spirit is for us to become more Christlike through the help of the Holy Spirit. What does it look like for us to be gentle?

First, we have to realize that gentleness does not mean weakness. When the scriptures talk about gentleness we typically see two main categories. The first one is the action of **Restrained Strength**. The bible dictionary definition of this is displaying the right amount of strength for the given circumstance. It's not weakness but rather using the right amount of strength for the situation. The bible also talks about gentleness as a **Posture of Affliction**. This is when someone withholds their strength because they are trusting in God.

Gentleness is actually one of Jesus' defining characteristics. Dane Ortlund wrote a book called *Gentle and Lowly*. In his research, he discovered that in all of the Gospels, there is only one place where Jesus tells us about His own heart. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus tells us that He is, "gentle and humble in heart…". The heart, by the way, in this time period meant a person's central operating system. The core of what made them tick. Jesus is gentle and we see example after example of this in the gospels. So, what does this mean for us? What does it look like for us to be gentle?

First: We have to be willing to come to Him. Jesus' command/invitation in Matthew 11:28 is, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." In order for us to display the gentleness of Christ, we have to have experienced it first. From there, we are able to love others. The New Testament reminds us time and time again that we are to be gentle with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. In the way we restore another who has sinned or in the way we lead others or in bearing with one another. Gentleness is key. Gentleness is also imperative when it comes to loving the world around us. Peter reminds us that we are to be ready to give an answer when someone asks us why we live the way we do. He then says that we are to do it with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some things that come to mind when you hear the word gentleness? Is it a word that you typically associate with Jesus? Why or why not?
2. Talk about a time when you experienced or observed gentleness. What was it like? What was the outcome?
3. In Matthew 11, Jesus says we can learn from him and find rest for our souls because he is "gentle and lowly in heart." In what ways are you weary and burdened this week?
4. Is it comforting or discomforting that Jesus does not describe himself in terms of his power, but instead in terms of his "lowliness"?
5. Think of the stories we read, watch, and share with our children. Do any of these offer good examples of gentleness? How often do we tell each other stories where problems are solved by some other means than violent ones? What does this do to our soul and the souls of our little ones?
6. Can Christians be ambitious in our society without giving in to the world's notions of success and status? What might this look like? How can we be gentle in a world of power and prestige?
7. Why is gentleness so important when it comes to the Christian's interactions with the world around us? Read 1 Peter 3:15 to help with discussion on this particular question.
8. How can we practice being Jesus' gentle and open arms this week? What does that look like practically for you?
9. Make a list of people in your life who might need God's gentleness. Share one or two of these people with the group for accountability to reach out to them and share God's gentleness. Ask God how he specifically and uniquely wants to show gentleness to your people.