

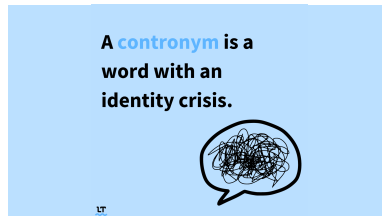
## Now You're Getting It: Meekness

Matthew 5:5



English can be a bit of a strange language. There are plenty of things about our language that don't quite make sense.

One of those things I've spent some time researching this week are words called contronyms, sometimes called autoantonyms. You may have never heard of that. I actually hadn't heard that term before this week, either.



What is a contronym? It's a single word with two completely opposite meanings. You could say, it's a word with an identity crisis.

Let me give you some examples.

The first is "clip."

We don't see these too much anymore (thankfully), but a number of years ago it was pretty popular to have a phone case that would clip – or attach – to your belt. So in that sense, clip clearly means you're attaching something to something else.

But if you go home today and clip your fingernails, you're not attaching anything. In fact, you're cutting your nails.

So "to clip" can mean both to attach something or to detach something.

"Dust" is another one.

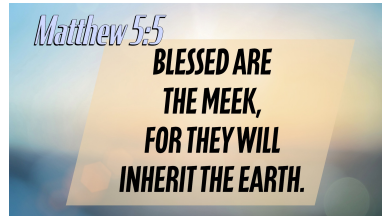
When you dust at home, your goal is to remove the dust from all those surfaces that collect it, right? You don't want that dust there, so the goal of dusting is to remove the dust.

But if you're baking, to dust means exactly the opposite. You *want* to apply a layer of dust to whatever you're baking, perhaps powdered sugar over a batch of baked goods.

Two different scenarios resulting in either the addition of or the removal of a layer of dust.

Like I said, English can be a strange language.

In all the lists I looked at this week of all the different contronyms out there, one word never appeared that I expected to appear. And that word is the center of today's Beatitude.



Let's go ahead and read today's Beatitude. In Matthew 5:5, Jesus says:

*<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.*

Today we are talking about being meek. I don't think this is very clear in our modern world, because I think many of us have the wrong idea what this word means. That's why I was expecting to find the word "meek" on one of these list of words with two opposite meanings.

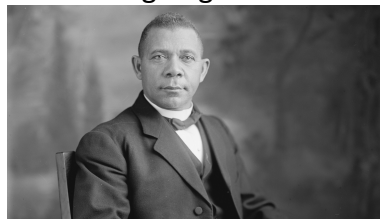


I mean – if we just look at some of the synonyms for meek in a thesaurus, we get words like timid, spineless, spiritless, and weak.

Do we really think Jesus is calling us to be spiritless or weak? I don't think so. Jesus himself was described as meek. Was he those things? Definitely not.

So there must be something else at play here. Jesus must be driving at a different attitude than being small and insignificant.

I could stand up here and tell you what it really means to be meek. But I think it would be better if I *showed* you. So I have a couple examples I want to share with you today. And I hope after we look at these, we'll be able say we're starting to get it. We're understanding meekness.



First, I have a story about Booker T. Washington. You may know, but if you don't, Washington was one of the most prominent black figures of the late 1800s and early 1900s. He was brought up in slavery, but freed during the Civil War.

As a free man, he worked his way through school and attended college at Wayland Seminary. In 1881, he was named the first leader of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, an institute for black higher education.

Shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute, he was walking in an exclusive section of town when he was stopped by a wealthy white woman.

Not knowing Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. He had no pressing business at the moment, so he smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do work the humble chore as asked.

When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A little girl in the home recognized him and later told the woman who this was that was chopping their firewood.

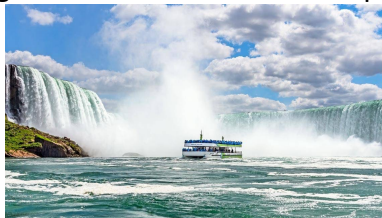
The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely.

"It's perfectly all right, Madam," he replied. "Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend."

All Booker T. Washington had to do was introduce himself and I'm sure he could have been on his way. But something kept him from doing that, and that same something urged him to chop firewood for this woman.

That something was meekness. Meekness didn't make Booker T. Washington a weak man. It opened him up to humble service of a stranger.

Our second example this morning takes us farther north to a place you all know.



Niagara Falls is one of the most spectacular sights on our continent. It is so incredible that it was named one of the Seven Natural Wonders of North America in 2014.

The roar of 6 million cubic feet of water each minute gives it the greatest flow rate of any waterfall on the planet. And Horseshoe Falls (the tallest of the waterfalls that make up Niagara) is the most powerful waterfall in North America.

It is a breathtaking display of power.

But did you know that more than half of the Niagara River's water is diverted before it even reaches the falls? Four huge tunnels move water through hydroelectric turbines that supply power to nearby areas in the US and Canada before returning to the river well past the Falls.

Think about that for a minute.

Half of the water of the Niagara River makes its way to the falls in this spectacular display of nature. And while it's certainly something to marvel at, what happens after that water hits the bottom of the Falls?

Not a whole lot. In fact, it just floats away. All that power and energy and then it's done.

But the other half of the river is harnessed and controlled, and with that control comes something that benefits so many people in that area of the world.

I think we're often tempted to live our lives like Niagara Falls— wild, spectacular, and loud. But power without control dissipates into useless energy.

But just because all the water doesn't roar over the falls and crash to the river below doesn't mean the rest of the water is powerless.

Seeing that water being moved through tunnels might not be visually stunning. But it does serve a huge purpose.

We can learn a lesson in meekness from the waters of Niagara Falls.



I think what we really need to understand at this point is that meekness is not weakness.

Booker T. Washington was hardly weak when he humbled himself.

The waters of the Niagara River that create energy for thousands upon thousands of people contain just as much power as the waters that flow over the edge of the Falls.

Meekness is not about giving up our strength. It's about knowing when and how to use it. It's about using our strength in ways that will truly benefit the Kingdom of God.

And so, perhaps the best way to sum up meekness is simply this: it's about being gentle.

Meekness is about being gentle when you know you have the opportunity to really let someone have a piece of your mind.

Meekness is about being gentle when someone asks you for help and you have “better things to do.”

Meekness is about being gentle because Christ was gentle with us.

When we didn't get it, when we didn't understand what God was looking for in us, when we were lost in our sin, Christ showed us what it meant to be meek.

We have all needed gentleness. We have all needed that Savior who was meek himself.

But even when we understand meekness, even when we understand what that word means, we too often don't want any part in it. Meekness isn't a virtue the world values anymore.

Being meek doesn't always feel like being strong. And actually, in some ways, that's the point. We aren't called to be pushovers, but we are called to trust in God.

Being meek means that we trust in a God who is stronger and better and more just than all that is wrong in this world. Being meek means that we are willing to let go, and let God.

And if that feels like we're giving up on the world around us, that we're choosing to not go on the offensive when we have the strength to do so, I would remind you that the opposite is true.

When we trust in God's promise of justice, we are the ones that end up inheriting the earth.

We may be called to step aside on some of the battles we'll be faced with while we're here on this earth. We may be tempted to jump into the fray and battle it out, but then we should remember what it means to be meek.

When we are able to keep in check our own urge to pay back the evil of the world, even when we know we could win a battle or two, when we keep our strength under control – when we are gentle – that is when we inherit the earth.

This earth isn't meant to be ruled by evil forever.

We have been promised that one day God will remake His Kingdom, His entire Kingdom, and that there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

The meek are the ones that get to inherit the earth.

When you look around you and you see the beauty of God's creation, it certainly doesn't seem like much to ask to restrain ourselves, to let God be the One to intervene, and to live into that promise that one day we will inherit this Creation.

Being meek isn't in our nature. We are too often tempted to take matters into our own hands. We're too often tempted to fight our own battles, to give people a piece of our minds.

Thank God that we don't have to be meek on our own. Thank God that He sent His Son to show us what it means to be meek, to be our example – and then to send His Holy Spirit to work this change within us.

We couldn't do it on our own.

And when we recognize that, when we understand that we have needed God to be gentle with us, to nudge us toward the people He wants us to be, then we understand how to be meek with the world around us.

We understand how to lead the world by the example Christ set for us.

And then, we're finally getting it.

And all of God's people said...