

Gentleness | Dan Greene

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[0:00] Now, when you look at the list of the fruit of the Spirit, there are certain characteristics! that you want and even pray for. You want love. You want joy. You want peace. There are! others that you know you need even though you may not want them and those are patience and self-control. But the characteristic we're going to talk about tonight is not so high on our list.

When's the last time you prayed for gentleness? I would say that every man in this room wants to be considered a gentleman. But when you dissect that, we don't necessarily want to be a gentle man.

Gentleness doesn't win any football games. Gentleness doesn't get you ahead in the business world. Gentleness doesn't get you through traffic at rush hour. So you're sitting here probably thinking, gentle. I don't want to be that guy whose favorite movie is Bambi meets Thumper. I don't want to be that guy whose favorite movie is Raiders of the Lost Kitten. And I thought you might think that way. So I looked for a synonym with some punch, a synonym with some substance. And I found that this same Greek word is translated in some Bibles, meekness.

It's the same word that Jesus used in Matthew 5, 5 when he said, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Now, I don't think that helps us a whole lot. Because I looked up meek in Webster's Dictionary, and here's how it's defined. Too submissive, spineless, spiritless.

[2:02] Obviously, the world does not consider this an attribute. When Frederick Nietzsche that we talked about this morning, read Jesus' words, blessed are the meek, he quickly rephrased it to say, assert yourself, it is the arrogant who take over the earth. And that's kind of our motto today.

I mean, when you see a man in a commercial on TV, he's hairy, he looks like a linebacker, you know, he's got a slick sports car, he walks with a swagger, he grabs for the gusto, he gets all the women, he's bullish in business. Even when he's holding a hair dryer, he's kind of cocky and arrogant. And that's kind of the motto or the model for men today. And so the world would say, blessed are the rough and the tough and the assertive. Remember when George W or H.W. Bush was inaugurated, he said this, I want America to be a kinder, gentler nation. And I'm kind of certain that people chuckled under their breath when they heard that and probably are still chuckling under their breath today. But regardless of what the world may be saying, and regardless of what you may be thinking, the Spirit of God wants to produce the fruit of gentleness in your life. So the question is, what does a gentle person look like? And to help us understand that, I want to point out four things about gentleness. Number one is the explanation of gentleness. What is gentleness? What is meekness?

Is it being spineless? This word was used several, this Greek word was used several different ways in the first century. It was used to describe the soothing quality of an ointment that took the sting out of a burn. So when it was applied to a human being, it would mean somebody who is soothing, someone who is non-abrasive, someone who is calming and easy to be around. The word was also used this way. It was used of a king who conquered a tyrant and had the power to act otherwise, but chose to be gracious. And then here, I think, is the best use of the word. It was used of a wild horse that had been broken by its trainer and it had the power to rear and buck, but it had been broken. Now let me have you think about that horse for a minute.

What is true about that horse is not that it had lost power, because it still had all the power it had to begin with, but it was that it had gained gentleness.

Now that should help to alleviate some of the misconceptions about gentleness, because gentleness is not weakness. Meekness is not weakness. It's not the 98-pound weakling who gets the sand kicked in his face.

[5:30] It's not the Casper milquetoast who kind of strains to squish a grape. It doesn't give us that idea. In fact, to be gentle doesn't take less power.

It actually takes more power. The most powerful man who ever lived was a gentle man. Jesus who could say a word and calm a storm.

Jesus who could say a word and a battalion of soldiers fell flat on their back. Jesus who could say a word and a dead man came back to life.

Jesus who could say this about himself in Matthew 11 29. I am gentle and humble in heart. You see, Jesus was gentle because he was soothing to be around.

Jesus was gentle because he was power under control. When Peter was in the garden in front of that battalion of soldiers, he did the macho thing.

[6:39] He pulled out his sword and swung it. And what did Jesus do? Jesus said, put your sword away. And then he gently restored the ear to that man.

And then he told Peter this in Matthew 26 53. He said that he could have called 12 legions of angels. Now a legion is 5,000.

So 12 times 5,000 is what? 60,000. So Jesus says, I could call 60,000 angels right now.

In other words, Peter, I don't need you to bail me out of this situation. I have the power to take care of this, but I have power under control.

He was gentle. He did the same thing at his trial. Imagine the one who could say in Matthew 28 18 that he had all authority in heaven and on earth, was mocked and abused.

[7:43] His beard was pulled out. He was spit on, falsely accused, beaten. And how did he respond? Did he respond like the incredible Hulk?

No. Isaiah 53 7 says, he was like a lamb that was led to the slaughter and like a sheep that is silent before it shears.

Why didn't he fight back? Well, he was the king who had the power to act otherwise, but chose to be gracious to you and me.

His gentleness, his meekness wasn't evidence of weakness. It was evidence of strength. He had power under control. Jesus was not a 98 pound weakling inside or out.

He looked the religious leaders in the eye in Matthew 23 and he said, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. He made a whip in John 2 and ran the money changers out of the temple.

[8:56] When Pilate tried to intimidate Jesus in John 19 10 by saying, don't you know that I have authority to release you and I have authority to let you go. And Jesus said, you would have no authority if I didn't give it to you.

You see, meekness is not weakness. Jesus was not meek because he had no other option. He had power under control.

Let me demonstrate this another way. You know who the meekest man in the Old Testament was? Numbers 12, 3 says, the man Moses was very meek, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.

So Moses was the most gentle man on the face of the earth in his day. And how do we see his gentleness? If you read what was happening right before that verse, it says he was the meekest man on the earth.

And right after that verse, he was being criticized by Aaron and Miriam, his brother and sister. And he remained silent in that situation.

[10:11] And just as a side note, they were criticizing him because he married Zipporah, the Cushite woman, which is kind of interesting because Cush is in Africa. So they were criticizing him because he married a black woman.

And his brother and sister didn't like it. They were criticizing him. God got angry about it. And you remember what happened to Miriam?

Miriam got leprosy. And the Bible specifically says she was white as snow. So God is basically saying, you like white?

I'll give you white. You'll be whiter than you ever were. And so I think God was stepping in, giving his opinion on the subject of racism.

But that's a sidebar. Was Moses weak? No. In Exodus 2, we see Moses is the guy who killed an Egyptian when he got angry.

[11:22] After God broke him, he's the one who stood before Pharaoh in Egypt with nothing but a stick and a stammering tongue and said, let my people go. Moses was not a spineless coward.

I love this. When he came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments in Exodus 32, he saw the people had made a golden calf and were dancing around it. And here's what it says in verse 19.

And Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it over the surface of the water, and made the sons of Israel drink it.

Now, I don't think anybody thought he was a wimp that day. But he's the gentlest man on the face of the earth. You say, well, why did Moses show gentleness on some occasions and force on other occasions?

Well, this is an important question. And here's the answer, I think. When there were attacks made against Moses personally, he was gentle and silent.

[12:37] But when there were attacks made against God, he threw down the gauntlet. Jesus is the same way. When he was attacked personally, he was gentle and silent.

But when they turned his father's house into a den of robbers, that's when he made a whip. So you see, gentleness is not weakness.

And then here's the second misconception. Gentleness is not natural. It's not natural to be gentle. It's not natural to be soothing.

It's not natural to have your power under control. It's not natural to endure criticism without retaliating. What is natural is just the opposite.

It's natural to demand your rights. It's natural to put yourself first. It's natural to say nobody messes with me. Robert Ringer wrote a book a few years ago.

[13:35] It went to the top of the New York Times bestseller list. It was entitled Looking Out for Number One. And then he wrote a follow-up book that sold more copies than the first.

And it was entitled Winning Through Intimidation. Now, I don't need to read any of those books because I've got that down.

Okay? I figured out how to put me first and how to win through intimidation. But that's really the attitude of our day.

And I think many Christians follow that pattern because they're kind of like Frank Sinatra Christians. They want to strut into heaven saying, I did it my way. Well, you know, if we do it our way, if we do what is natural, we will push and claw and fight our way to the top.

But gentleness is not natural. That's why the Bible says it's a characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit. that the Spirit of God has to produce in you.

[14:49] Let me say a second thing about gentleness. First was the explanation of gentleness. Here's the example of gentleness. And once again, we look at God.

And if you have your Bible, I want you to look at Isaiah chapter 40 real quick. Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 10 says, Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with his arm ruling for him.

Behold, his reward is with him and his recompense before him. And then slide to verse 15 of chapter 40. Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales.

Behold, he lifts up the islands like fine dust. Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before him.

They are regarded by him as less than nothing and meaningless. And then look at verse 26. Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars.

[16:02] The one who leads forth their hosts by number. He calls them all by name. Because of the greatness of his might and the strength of his power, not one of them is missing.

And then right in the midst of all this powerful activity by God, I want you to look at verse 11. It says, Like a shepherd, he will tend his flock.

In his arm, he will gather the lambs and carry them in his bosom. He will gently lead the nursing youth. I don't know if there's any more gentle picture than a shepherd carrying his lamb close to his heart.

And that's how God handles us. And if you look at verse 10, it says, With his arm he rules. And then verse 11, With his arm he gathers the lambs.

There's his power. And there's his power. Under control. The same arm that powerfully rule rules the universe gently gathers the lambs.

[17:16] Gentleness is not weakness. It's power under control. Maybe you can relate to Elijah. Elijah had the best day of his career and the worst day of his career back to back.

He defeated the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. And some people miss this when they read the account.

It actually says that Elijah took them down into the valley and slaughtered them. This guy was nobody to mess with. You know, so he killed 450 prophets by himself that day.

But then he fled from Jezebel and went out into the wilderness and resigned. He turned in his resignation to God. In fact, said, take my life. And then he waited for God's response.

And if you remember, God came first of all in a great wind. Or God didn't come, but a great wind came. And God wasn't in the wind. And then an earthquake came and God wasn't in the earthquake.

[18:18] And then a fire came and God wasn't in the fire. And then there was a gentle blowing breeze. And that's where God showed up. And what I love about that is that God didn't show up with a flying fist.

He showed up with a gentle hand. And so our God is the example of gentleness. And when you come to the New Testament, Jesus is our example.

For that, I want you to look at Matthew chapter 11. This is a familiar couple verses. But in Matthew chapter 11 and verse 28, Jesus says, Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

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. And then I want you to look over at chapter 12 of Matthew.

And here's a quote from Isaiah 42 talking about Jesus. And notice what it says in verse 20. A battered reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not put out.

[19:39] Now what do you do when you're walking through a field or walking through the woods and you see a broken branch on a tree? If you're like me, you just yank it off. Or if you see a candle wick drowning in wax, what do you do?

You blow it out. You know, what's the word that you do? Well, it says Jesus didn't do that. Now, is this talking about literally he didn't do that? No.

Because look at verse 21. Verse 21 says, And in his name the Gentiles will hope.

So the broken twig and the wick about to go out are people without hope. The Gentiles, that's you and me for the most part.

And he provided that hope for them. He didn't brush them aside. He didn't break off that branch. He didn't blow out that candle when we were in that condition. He provided hope for you and me.

[20:41] And our world today is filled with people just like that who need hope. They're bruised and they're broken. And maybe you're here tonight and you're bruised and you're broken.

Maybe emotionally. Maybe physically. Maybe socially. Maybe spiritually. Or maybe you're kind of like a smoldering wick. You're gasping for air.

You're weak. You're flickering. You feel like you're about to go out. And Jesus is still saying, come unto me. For I am gentle and humble.

And I will give you rest. If you need an example of gentleness, you only have to look at the Lord Jesus. When he met the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4, she was a reed.

Broken. Broken by sin. Bruised. He gently brought her to conviction and drew her to himself. When they brought the woman caught in adultery in John 8, she was a flickering wick about to go out.

[21:45] In fact, the Jews were going to stone her to death. And he gently forgave her and told her to go and sin no more. When parents brought their young children to him in Mark 10, the disciples said, let's just brush these fragile reeds out of the way.

But Jesus gently took them into his arms. In Revelation chapter 5, I love it when John is there and there's a book that can't be opened.

And somebody tells him that the lion of the tribe of Judah has overcome, so he's going to open the book. And John turns around to see the lion.

And what does he see? He sees a lamb standing as if slain. So he's looking for the lion. And Jesus comes as the lamb.

Because he's gentle. And he cares about giving us the hope that we need. Let me say a third thing. This is the expression of gentleness.

[22:50] When should others see the fruit of gentleness in your life? Let me give you four occasions that the Bible underlines. Number one, you need gentleness when someone has done you wrong.

Colossians 3.12 says, Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. And the next verse says, Bearing with one another and forgiving each other whoever has a complaint against anyone.

You see, I need a heart of gentleness to put up with people who are hard to put up with. I need a heart of gentleness to forgive those who I have a complaint against.

So when someone has done me wrong, the weak person returns the wrong. The strong person takes the wrong.

Like Jesus about whom it said in 1 Peter 2.23, And while being reviled, he did not revile in return. While suffering, he uttered no threats, but kept entrusting himself to him who judges righteously.

[24:06] You need gentleness when someone has done you wrong. Secondly, you need gentleness when someone disagrees with you. 2 Timothy 2.24 says, And the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wrong, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition.

When you have to correct someone who is wrong, you need gentleness. And Jesus illustrated this over and over again. I mean, Jesus' closest friends were needing to be corrected all the time.

They were always arguing about who was the greatest. In Luke 9.54, James and John wanted to call down fire out of heaven and burn up a town in Samaria.

They sent their mother to Jesus to request the places of honor in the kingdom. In fact, in Mark 8.32, Peter had the audacity to take Jesus aside and rebuke him.

So he was continually correcting them. But Jesus never corrected them with force. He always corrected them with gentleness. The weak person argues.

[25:18] The meek person instructs. And then you need gentleness when someone has fallen into sin. Galatians 6.1 says, If a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.

Someone has referred to the church as the only army that shoots its wounded. But that's not what we're called to do. We're called to restore them. And we're to do that in gentleness.

I like what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7.

And we miss this a lot of times because he talks about the log in your own eye. But he talks about taking the speck out of your brother's eye. And he doesn't say you don't need to mess with your brother.

He said, Get the log out and then you can take the speck out of your brother's eye. And taking the speck out of your brother's eye is a very delicate thing to do.

[26:23] It takes a lot of gentleness. I don't know if anybody's ever asked you to try to get something out of their eye. And it's a very scary

thing for me because I'm like, I can make this worse in a quick minute. But you have to be very cautious and careful and gentle to get that out. And when your brother falls into sin, the weak person judges him or condemns him or even turns their back on him. The meek person restores him. And then you need gentleness when someone is lost and needs Jesus. We saw it this morning, 1 Peter 3.15. Set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness. How do you defend your faith? Are you rough and tough and hard to diaper? Are you, you know, the aggressive one, the assertive one that wants to argue people into the kingdom of God? [27:30] Are you someone who is gentle in bringing them to Jesus? We need the attitude of Jesus when He approached Jerusalem in Luke 19.41. It says, when He saw the city, He wept over it. Now, why did Jesus weep? Did He weep because He knew by the end of the weekend He was going to be dead? No. He tells us why He wept. He says He wept because they were like chicks without a hen, and He wanted to gather them like that hen, but they were unwilling. And so He's praying for the lost people in Jerusalem. When's the last time you wept over somebody who was lost? When's the last time your pillow got wet over the people of St. Louis or Kirkwood or Webster Groves or Maplewood? [28:40] Psalm 126.5 says, Those who sow in tears shall reap in joyful shouting. If you want to reap with joy, you have to first sow with tears, with brokenness, with gentleness. So when someone has done you wrong, you need gentleness. When someone disagrees with you, you need gentleness. When someone has fallen into sin, you need gentleness. When someone is lost and needs Jesus, you need gentleness. Fourth thing I want to say is the effect of gentleness. Now most of us have the idea that gentleness is not very effective. We have the idea that gentleness won't get you very far. It's kind of like Leo de Rocher, who said, nice guys finish last. But the Bible tells us that gentleness will get you much further than brute strength. In fact, in God's economy, gentleness is powerful. That's why when we see the king of kings riding into Jerusalem in Matthew 21, what does he look like? [29:56] The Bible says he's gentle and riding on a donkey. So if the king looks like that, what should his followers look like? You see, in God's kingdom, if you haven't figured this out, there's a lot of paradoxes. The Bible says, the last will be first, the humble will be exalted, and the gentle will rule. That's what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 5, 5, when he said, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. That's paradoxical. We don't expect that to happen, but the meek inherit the earth. So if you want to get ahead in God's kingdom, you don't do it by asserting yourself. You do it by being gentle. Gentleness is effective. That's why David could say in Psalm 18, 35, your gentleness makes me great. [31:05] How is gentleness effective? Let me give you two ways in closing. First, it's effective toward others, and secondly, it's effective towards me. It's effective toward others. That's why Paul chose not to yell at the Christians in Corinth, even though they were doing all kinds of things wrong. Instead, here's what he said in 2 Corinthians 10, 1, I urge you, or I beg you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Paul knew that gentleness is far more effective. I don't think anyone would dispute the fact that the greatest basketball coach of all times was John Wooden. At UCLA, he won 11 national championships in 13 seasons. He won seven in a row. In fact, in one stretch, he won 88 straight games. He wrote a book that was simply entitled Wooden. And here's how he starts the book. I just want to read you the first few sentences. My dad, Joshua Wooden, was a strong man in one sense, but also a gentle man.

[32:19] While he would lift heavy weights men half his age couldn't lift, he would also read poetry to us each night after a day working in the fields, raising corn, hay, wheat, tomatoes, and watermelons.

We had a team of mules named Jack and Kate on our farm. Kate would often get stubborn and lie down on me when I was plowing. I couldn't get her up no matter how roughly I treated her.

Dad would see my predicament and walk across the field until he was close enough to speak to her, and then he would just simply say, Kate. Then she would get up and start working again.

He never touched her in anger. And then he added this. It took me a long time to understand that even a stubborn mule responds to gentleness.

And what is true of mules is true of people. Gentleness is effective. If you're a wife and you have a husband who's stubborn as a mule, the Bible tells you in 1 Peter 3, you're to win him without a word with a gentle and quiet spirit.

[33:34] Now you may want to hit him with a two-by-four, but that's not as effective as gentleness is. And then gentleness is effective on me.

Listen to James 1.21.

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in meekness, receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

You know what that verse tells me? It tells me you can't get into heaven if you don't have meekness. It tells me that you can't hear God's voice without a spirit of meekness.

Just as farmer's seeds can penetrate the ground only when it's plowed and broken, the seed of the gospel will only penetrate a heart when it's broken and humble and gentle.

Chuck Colson was a personal advisor to Richard Nixon. He was one of the most powerful men in the most powerful government in the world.

[34:44] As a former Marine captain, he earned the title of the White House Hatchet Man. He looks back and refers to himself as the toughest of the Nixon tough guys. Listen to his account of an evening that changed his life forever.

One gray overcast evening, I sought out my friend Tom Phillips. He read aloud the chapter on pride from C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity.

That one chapter ripped through the protective armor in which I had unknowingly encased myself for the past 42 years. Of course I had not known God.

How could I? I had been too concerned with myself. I had done this and I had done that and I had achieved and I had succeeded. But in those brief moments while Tom read, I saw myself as I had never done before and the picture was ugly.

Would you like to pray together, Chuck? Tom asked. Startled, I emerged from my deep thoughts.

[35:48] Sure, I guess I would. Fine. I had never prayed with anyone before except when someone said grace before a meal. Tom bowed his head.

Lord, he began, we pray for Chuck and his family that you would open his heart and show him the light and the way. As Tom prayed, something began to flow into me, a kind of energy.

Then came a wave of emotion which nearly brought tears. I fought them back. It sounded as if Tom were speaking directly and personally to God, almost as if he were sitting beside us.

Later, outside in the darkness, the iron grip I had kept upon my emotions began to relax and tears welled up in my eyes as I groped for the right key to start the car.

Angrily, I brushed them away and started the engine and as I drove out of Tom's drive, the tears flowed uncontrollably. I was crying so hard, I was crying so hard, I pulled to the side of the road.

[37:05] I forgot about machismo, about pretenses, about fears of being weak.

And as I did, I began to experience a wonderful feeling of release. Then came the strange sensation that water was not only running down my cheeks but surging through my whole body, cleansing and cooling as it went.

They weren't tears of sadness and remorse, nor joy. They were tears of relief. And then I prayed my first real prayer.

God, I don't know how to find you, but I'm going to try. I'm not much the way I am now, but I want to give myself to you. I didn't know how to say more, so I just kept repeating over and over the words, take me, take me, take me.

And just like Chuck Colson, I can tell you today that if you will give yourself just the way you are to the Lord Jesus with a spirit of meekness, a spirit of gentleness, a spirit of brokenness, you too can be born again.

[38:43] Or if you're a believer here, but you can't say that you're walking in the spirit, if you're a believer here and you're kind of doing life your way, if you're a believer here and you need to be broken, then cry out to Jesus and say, I'm not much the way I am, but I want to give myself to you.

Take me. Take me. Take me. If you will, I can tell you He won't come out of heaven with a flying fist. He won't subdue you with His mighty arm of power. He won't pounce on you like a lion. He won't snap you off like a bruised reed.

He won't snuff you out like a wick in a candle. He'll come to you like a gentle breeze.

He'll gather you gently in His arm like a mother hen, like a shepherd, like a lamb standing as it's laying. And He will give you rest.

[40:08] Will you call out to Him today in brokenness? Let's pray. Father, we thank You for gentleness, which is who You are and how You operate with us.

And we're so thankful for that. Father, we pray that we would truly today, if we're not, get in right relationship with You so that You by Your Spirit could produce that gentleness in us as well.

We pray that we would be walking examples of what it means to have power under control. And Lord, we just pray that You'll use us in whatever way You wish to Your glory as we seek to walk in the fullness of Your Spirit.

We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.