

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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Series: Some Fruit, More Fruit, Much Fruit

SERMON: Gentleness: Power Under Control

(Credit Cynthia Fantasia and John Koessler)

Introduction

Good morning, good to see all of you this morning and those joining on line, thanks for joining.

John Wooden, a revered college basketball coach, credited much of his success to his dad. He recalled an occasion when he watched his father deal with a certain situation. The county would pay local farmers to use teams of horses to haul loads of gravel out of the gravel pits. Sometimes it was hard for a team to pull a wagon, filled with gravel, up the steep incline.

One steamy summer day, a young farmer was trying to get his team of horses to pull a fully loaded wagon out of a pit. He was whipping and cursing those horses. They were frothing at the mouth, stomping, and pulling back from him. The elder Wooden watched for a while, then went over to the young man and said, "Let me take 'em for you."

Wooden said, "Dad started talking to the horses, almost whispering to them, and stroking their noses with a soft touch. Then he walked between them, while he continued talking- calmly and gently-as they settled down. Then he stepped out in front of them and gave a little whistle to start them moving forward. Within moments, those two big plow horses pulled the wagon out of the gravel pit as easy as could be.

John Wooden said, "I've never forgotten what I saw him do and **how** he did it. Over the years I've seen a lot of people act like that angry young farmer who lost control. ... So much more can usually be accomplished by a calm, confident, and steady approach."

Wooden's take away from that incident: **"It takes strength inside to be gentle on the**

outside."

Today we continue our series on the Fruit of the Spirit from Paul's list in [Galatians 5:22-23](#) **Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control.**

You may be thinking, this is the 3rd week in a row we have seen this passage. We know it already. I almost made that same conclusion until I came across an article about a man who he said he started everyday by quoting this passage out loud to himself. Just to remind himself of what Jesus expected of him that day. I thought, that is not a bad idea for me, and us. Let's never get tired of hearing these verses in our heads.

Today we focus on **Gentleness**. There is another English word closely related to gentleness and is often interchanged with gentleness in translations. The word is: **Meekness**.

We'll start by getting a better **understanding** of **gentleness/meekness** as Paul meant it here. Then we will look at several **examples** in the life **of Jesus showing gentleness** and finally think about how **gentleness** can be **expressed in our lives**.

Many people, when they hear the attributes, gentleness or meekness, do not think of a **highly** desired trait – particularly for a leader. Many people think “weak” when they hear meek. Have you ever heard a politician campaign with, “Vote for me. I’m gentle.”

Or do you include being meek on your resume when you are looking for a job. I went back and looked at the survey we used to help us think about the desirable qualities of the next lead pastor at Five Forks. We did not mention meekness and gentleness. Maybe because we are more familiar with the English definitions of **gentleness/meekness** – they are things like: **mild, moderate, soft, delicate, submissive**. – not popular for leaders in our culture.

And yet this is a quality God wants to be cultivating in our lives – in ever increasing measure.

So perhaps the struggle is, we don't really understand the trait well.

Charles Swindoll writes:

In our rough and rugged individualism, we think of gentleness as weakness—being soft and virtually spineless. Not so!

Gentleness includes such enviable qualities as having strength under control, being calm and peaceful when surrounded by a heated atmosphere, having a soothing effect on those who may be angry or otherwise beside themselves. Possessing tact and gracious courtesy that causes others to retain their self-esteem and dignity.

Now that sounds like something to strive for.

One person summed up:

Gentleness – as Power Under Control

The Greek word for gentleness comes from two words. One means **humility, considerateness, meekness**. It usually refers to things, objects, or people—like words that are gentle, soothing medicine, soothing actions. This word might refer to tame animals or generous people. You would want your close friends to be this way with you.

The other word is a word used to express a **balanced, intelligent, decent outlook on life**—we might call a person with this trait, a good citizen, someone we admired or trusted.

The Greek philosopher, Plato, called this trait the ‘cement of society.’ In his mind, gentleness held society together – when anger, vengeance, harshness, power struggles threatened to tear the society apart.

So: the Greeks – (most of Paul’s readers were Greeks) defined gentleness as **power under control**. Their word picture was that of a horse that had been tamed. You see, gentleness was to them, a powerful animal but whose passion and power was fully and completely under control.

Gentleness is far from being weak.

Think of the story of John Wooden’s dad with the horses. The young farmer, yelling at

the horses was unable to get them to pull the heavy wagon. But when they were calmed by Mr. Wooden's gentle manner, their great strength was able to accomplish the task with ease.

The stereotype of meekness is a person who has no will of his own. We often think of the gentle person as someone who is passive – they just let things happen. Someone who cannot help letting others take advantage of him. In fact:

A. Gentleness actually **requires strength**.

In **2 Timothy 2:24-25**, Paul identifies this as an essential quality of leadership when he says: **"The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth."**

Gentleness requires strength. Strength to face opposition without always giving in but also without losing your cool.

I listen to talk radio sometimes. I have noticed how many radio hosts, when they are challenged by someone with a different point of view, resort to interrupting, cutting the caller off, and then ridiculing them, and controlling them by hanging up on them. The host may think they are the ones with the power, but really, they have just demonstrated their own weakness.

If they had strength, they would have been able to stay calm and gentle. One person used the phrase – **Gentle Firmness – soft and yielding but not wishy-washy**. The gentle person does not have to back away from their position. But they choose to back away from the need to win an argument. That takes strength of character and will.

Loud boisterous arguments are not a show of strength, but a display of weakness.

B. Gentleness also **requires humility**

We see this connection between gentleness and humility in the invitation of Jesus in **Matthew 11:28-30**, where Jesus says, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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."

Jesus' invitation is grounded in the attractiveness of gentleness and humility. "Come to me. Take my yoke on you ... learn from me." Why would we want to do that?

"Because I am gentle and humble," Jesus says, "and you will find rest for your souls." There is an attractiveness about humility. It is compelling."

So, what is humility in this context?

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes **"If you meet a really humble man. Probably all you will think about him is that he seems like a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him."**

But here is a good question. If I am humble, in the biblical sense, do I know it? Is the one who says he is humble, actually a proud person? And if that is true, where can we go to get humility? And how will we ever know if we have acquired it?

We can be sure of this: humility doesn't come from looking in the mirror. It doesn't come from examining ourselves for signs that we are humble.

The place to start is: to look for the pride in ourselves—and expect to find it. C. S. Lewis writes, **"If anyone would like to acquire humility, I think I can tell him the first step. The first step, and it is a big one, is to realize that one is proud. Nothing can be done before that step. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed."**

Pride is the antithesis of humility. It distorts our image of ourselves. Pride will take some achievement and blow it out of proportion. For example: Someone commends you for something you did well. And suddenly you find yourself thinking you are a better person than someone else. That's what pride does.

Pride blinds us, so that we fail to see glaring faults in ourselves that are so obvious to others. Or it minimizes the few weaknesses we are willing to admit. We say, "Well at least I am not like so and so..." "What I did wasn't as bad as what they did."

As a result, pride keeps us from letting others be first, letting others be most important, or most influential. Pride causes us to “push our weight around.” Something gentle people don’t do.

Gentleness and meekness, on the other hand, will cause one to step back and freely allow others to go first. Gentleness requires humility.

Now let’s look at some **Examples of Gentleness in Jesus’ life**. What we find is that in each case:

C. Gentleness Restores the Recipient

In John 4, Jesus encounters **a woman at a well**. This is the woman who was married five times and is now living with a man who isn’t her husband, and she’s a Samaritan. As a Jewish man, she was not the kind of person Jesus should want to be associated with. Jesus asks her for a drink of water, and her response is rather disrespectful. Yet Jesus responds gently. Why? Is he afraid of her? No.

Jesus responded gently because he saw beyond her reputation. He saw a thirsty and needy person. He saw a person who needed his ‘living’ water. He saw a person who needed restoration, and with gentleness, he restored her.

Then in Luke 19, we read the story of Jesus and that wee little man in the tree, **Zacchaeus**. Zacchaeus—the hated tax collector, rich because he took money from other people, absolutely despised by everyone. Does Jesus, upon seeing Zacchaeus, point his finger at him and accuse him of being the thief he really is? No. Jesus looks up, yes, points to him, and says,

“Zacchaeus, come down from that tree. I’m coming to your house for dinner tonight.” Jesus saw beyond Zacchaeus’ reputation. He saw a man who needed to be restored, and with gentleness he restored him.

Now picture this scene from Luke 2. **Martha**, a friend of Jesus, had invited him and his disciples over for dinner. Lots of preparation needed to go into this meal. So, picture Jesus

in the living room, Mary—Martha’s sister—sitting at his feet, and other disciples sitting with him. It’s a beautiful scene: Jesus is teaching, and Martha’s in the kitchen. All Luke says is that Martha was in the kitchen **then** she came out.

Between Martha in the kitchen and the word ‘then,’ I’m guessing there was some banging of pots and pans, maybe slamming of cabinet doors, some heavy sighs, all in hopes that Jesus might notice and come and say, “Can I help you? Is something wrong?”

But Martha gets all worked up, comes out, stands in front of Jesus, hands on her hips, and says, “Tell my sister to help me.” Face to face with his friend Martha, Jesus could have rebuked her. Instead, he says, “Martha, Martha.” Many think this was in an endearing, gentle tone of voice.

Jesus saw beyond her frustration. He saw beyond her anger. He saw beyond her jealousy. He saw a woman who needed to be restored, and he gently restored her.

Gentleness takes strength but it is strength or power under control. It takes humility. It restores the other person. Jesus was a master at exhibiting it in his interactions with people.

So let’s talk more about what it looks like for us.

D. Expressing Gentleness in Daily life

What does gentleness look like in my life, and your life, in our relationships, and in our church? What does meekness look like in the real world?

First, we must accept a tension that exists with gentleness. While gentleness requires strength. And gentleness does not always just back down, it does mean **there are going to be times I’m not going to get my way.**

I know it’s hard for some of us, including me, to accept, but it’s true. I may do all I can in a certain situation, and still not get my way. When that happens, I need to let go and trust God. It means I may have to give up my right to be right.

There are going to be times when I'll need some restoration. And there are going to be times when I will need to offer restoration. But we don't do gentleness to get our own way. We do gentleness because Holy Spirit produces it in our lives.

Where should we expect it to show up? Let me mention several but there are more.

1. Gentleness is displayed in my attitude.

Paul writes in [Philippians 2:4-5](#): “Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” And what do we know about his attitude? “He took the very nature of a servant. He humbled himself even to the point of death on a cross.”

Imagine this: each of us **living to serve** one another, to love one another, to put one another's interests above our own. It's an attitude that prompts us to park a little further away from church so that others can park closer. It is an attitude that prompts us to serve so others can take a short break from serving and be refreshed.

This kind of attitude can be seen in a **teachable spirit**. That is, thinking once in a while, “*Well, maybe I am wrong.*” “*Maybe there's more to the story than I know.*” “*Maybe I need to understand better.*” That kind of thinking is hard for the person who does not have a gentle attitude. And the thing is, even if I'm right, a gentle attitude says, “I don't have to flaunt it. Maybe not even mention it.”

I remember a time when my mentor had an idea for helping the church. But it was met with significant opposition. About 18 months later someone else suggested the very same thing. My mentor just said – “I like that idea. I think it is a good one.”

I know that's a hard concept, but we have to work on it. We need to choose this attitude. We need to choose to listen and sometimes delay or even give up our own preferences.

Whether Jesus was washing feet, serving lunch, healing the sick, or standing before Pilate, Jesus knew he was the Son of God sent to serve and to restore.

That's the truth that shaped his attitude and it must shape ours. That's the gentleness we see from God, who sent Jesus here, so that our relationship with God could be restored. It was Christ's gentleness that allowed him to forgive and to love even his enemies. And he calls each of us to be like him—to exhibit power and strength under control. This is the attitude of Christ.

2. Gentleness is displayed in my behavior.

Paul writes to the Ephesians and tells them to be **completely humble and gentle, "bearing with one another in love."** In the Bible, gentleness is often used as the opposite of such words as harsh, unrelenting, strict, and severe. Bearing with one another in love means to **hang in there with a person**, to **do acts of kindness**— like - bring a meal to someone, drive a friend to the hospital, or when you care for your child.

Behavior comes after attitude. When the attitude of your heart is in the right place, your behavior will follow.

If our behavior reflects the gentleness of Christ, we will be people whose energy is focused on serving others. We will be people who offer grace to one another, people who encourage rather than condemn, and people who give and receive mercy - generously. That's power and strength under his control.

3. Gentleness is displayed in my conversation. To the **Colossians 4:6** Paul wrote, **"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt so that you may know how to answer everyone."**

What does salt do? It preserves. It brings out flavor. It accentuates the best in something else. This is how our words are to be in the conversations we have.

In conversations, do people find my words full of grace and seasoned with salt? Someone once said, **"Never enter a life except to build."** The modern translation is this, what my mother had to say to me, far too often: **"If you don't have something good to say, don't say anything at all."** Do my words bring out the best in others?

The apostle James writes that **“our tongue is like a fire.”** Uncontrolled it will destroy. The power of the tongue, brought under control, can be used to strengthen, encourage, and guide. Every time we open our mouths—whether in our homes, our workplaces, our churches—every time we have a choice. Think to yourself, **“Will my words help or hurt? Will they build up, or will they tear down?”**

My children credit me with giving them this advice, that I am sure I got from someone else. **“Speak to people as if you love them, not as if you are trying to set them straight.”**

I wish I followed my own advice more often. I’m working on it.

The late pastor and writer **Eugene Peterson** once told a story about walking in Yellowstone Park with his wife and three children. Peterson wrote:

As my family and I were walking in a mountain meadow in Yellowstone Park, there was a little boy of four or five about 30 yards out in the meadow picking those exquisite alpine flowers. It is against the law to pick flowers in national parks. I was outraged. I yelled at him, “Don’t pick the flowers.” He just stood there wide-eyed, and terrified. He dropped the flowers and started crying.

You can imagine what happened next. My wife and children, my children especially, were all over me. “Dad, what you did was far worse than what he did! He was just picking a few flowers and you yelled, you scared him. You ruined him. He is probably going to have to go for counseling when he’s 40 years old.” My children were right. You cannot yell people into holiness. You cannot terrify people into the sacred. My yelling was a far worse violation of the holy place than his picking a few flowers.

Here is a habit I am going to invite you to develop so you can grow in gentleness in your conversations.

At the end of a meeting, or at the end of a day, in your mind, take some quiet time and **“Play back your conversations of the day.”** Were your words always full of grace? Were your words gentle? Was your tone of voice soft and soothing? And this is particularly important

for the conversations we have with the people closest to us – our spouse, our children or parents, a close friend or coworker.

I remember so vividly one time coming out of our children's room after, what I thought was an instructive, character building, although very one-sided conversation. Darlyss met me in the hallway and gently but firmly asked me, "Would you talk that way to the people at church?" and she followed up with, "Do you want to talk that way to the people you love the most?" What a valuable rebuke – thank you Darlyss for helping me grow in maturity in Christ.

More than once I have had to go to a person after a meeting and apologize and ask for forgiveness for not being gentle during the meeting.

As you and I mature in Christ – our conversations will become more gentle.

I want to consider for a few moments:

4. Gentleness displayed in the Church?

This is important because the world watches people, us, interacting in the church, for clues about whether God loves them.

Paul gives us an interesting snapshot in **Ephesians 4:2**, that I mentioned before, when he says, **Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.**"

In blunt terms, gentleness means that **you and I put up with each other**. It means that we will endure one another.

The Bible is so honest on this matter. Sometimes we give the impression that life in the church is a kind of utopia. We sometimes get the idea that real Christians never get annoyed with one another, never become frustrated with each other, never get fed up with one another.

One pastor recalled:

When I was a pastor, I quickly discovered that I couldn't please everyone in my ministry.

There were always a handful of people who were disappointed with my leadership. Some of these people, I eventually came to realize, were more than disappointed. I got the feeling they didn't like me. Of course, these were always the people I obsessed about. One night I was brooding out loud to my wife about someone who wasn't happy with me. She listened patiently to my complaints—the same ones she had heard many times before. Finally, she spoke: "So what if they don't like you?" she said. "You don't like them either!"

I know that doesn't happen at Five Forks, but I am sure it does in some lesser churches. Let's be open and honest. Church life is not a utopia.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do in the church is to "put up" with one another. It's a good thing, too, because some of us are hard to live with. I appreciate the emphasis on mutuality in Paul's command: bear with **"one another."** Do you find someone around you annoying or hard to deal with? Guess what? There is a high degree of likelihood that they struggle with the same issue regarding you.

Paul's instruction would hardly be helpful if it weren't for the clarifying phrase he adds at the end of the verse. He says we are to **"bear with one another in love."** Yes, life in the body of Christ does call for us to put up with each other, but not in a grudging, mean-spirited way. But rather in a loving way. A way that feels like love to the other person. And interacting with gentleness has to be at the heart of this.

Sometimes we pretend to put up with each other lovingly, but what actually goes on is a sinister passive-aggressiveness. Passive-aggressiveness is when we feel angry, resentful or frustrated but act neutral, pleasant or even cheerful. Then we find an indirect way to show someone how we really feel. This is not gentleness as described by Paul.

I once heard one person from another part of the country say that passive aggressiveness seems to be a common character trait of Central PA. Hmm. I thought. And I began wondering what part I played in that.

If I'm going to bear with others, gently, and "in love," I will need to have their best interests at heart. This is key to being able to be gentle with another person.

Conclusion

The fruit of gentleness must be seen in your attitude, in your behavior, and in your Conversation. Your spouse will disappoint you. Your boss will rub you the wrong way. Your kids will disobey. Your friends will betray you. Even your church will fail you at times. There will be times when things don't go the way you want them to. There will be times when you will be right, and everyone else will be wrong. What will you do? What choice will you make? Will you come out fighting? Will you add to that chip on your shoulder? Or will you respond honestly and humbly, using words sprinkled with grace and gentleness?

The right choice isn't one that just happens. The fruit of Gentleness comes from a life committed to living close to Jesus, the Vine. It is a life cultivated and committed to a deepening relationship with God. It's a life that offers grace because of the grace God has given.

True gentleness is power and strength that's been brought under God's control. Gentle people have been transformed by the surprising message of God's grace, and they delight in showing that grace to others.

PRAY