

# The Fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness

## Lesson Nine

The word "radiate" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font with a slight shadow effect. It is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page, partially overlapping a circular graphic element consisting of several concentric, light-colored rings.

### Settling In: About 10-20 minutes

- 1) Make a note to yourself who, if anyone, is missing from your home group this week.
- 2) Spend some time finding out how everyone is doing: make a note for prayer requests.
- 3) Introduce a time of conversational prayer. Make it clear that group members are not required to participate if they are not comfortable.

or

- 4) Introduce a time of testimony: ask several members to share one or two special things that God did for them this week. After a time of sharing, lead into a time of thanksgiving prayer for God's kindness and faithfulness.

### Opener: About 10 minutes

- 1) Read: Gal 5:22,23.
- 2) Do you think gentleness is valued as a virtue today? Why or why not?
- 3) What does "gentleness" mean to you?

*Gentleness is a somewhat ambiguous concept in Hebrew and Greek as well as in English. The ambiguity arises from the fact that the term can denote both strength and vulnerability. Thus gentleness may be understood as a positive or a negative characteristic: on the one hand, as forbearance and kindness towards the helpless, or purposeful and self-chosen powerlessness; on the other, as oversensitivity and timidity in the face of everyday life. NDBT*

### Mini-teach: About 10 minutes About Gentleness

- 1) Gentleness is probably one of the most underrated biblical virtues. You are more likely to hear someone request prayer for more faith or patience than gentleness.
  - a) Gentleness may have a PR problem. It is often associated with "blandness" or worse, "weakness".
  - b) You probably won't find "gentle" in anyone's self-description on facebook.
- 2) It may be that gentleness needs a makeover. Actually the biblical version of gentleness is quite powerful and the strongest characters in the Bible consistently demonstrate it. No one would describe any of these men as "bland" or "weak".
  - a) Moses is described as "the meekest (a common synonym for 'gentle') man on earth" (Nu 12:3).
  - b) Jesus described himself as "gentle" (Mt 11:29).
  - c) The apostle Paul describes his ministry as "gentle". (1 Th 2:7)
- 3) Gentleness is made more understandable by considering its opposite.
  - a) Consider the works of the flesh mentioned in Gal 5:20. Gentleness is the opposite of "rivalry, jealousy, angry outbursts, selfish ambition, conflict, factions, and envy".

"... Paul undoubtedly means... "considerateness" or "gentleness" toward others, which is the opposite of an arrogant and self-assertive spirit." Longenecker, WBC, vol 41

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- b) These negative attitudes and actions are characteristic of people who place themselves or their causes first without consideration for the needs and feelings of others.
- c) When we rely on force and aggression to get our way in life we have missed something very important about the fruit of the Spirit.

### Discussion 1: About 15 minutes

#### The Gentleness of Jesus

##### 1) Matthew 11:28-30

- a) Jesus says that he is "gentle and humble". What evidence do you see of this in:
  - i) His birth (Lu 2:6-12)?
  - ii) His ministry (Jn 8:9-11)?
  - iii) His public image (Mt 21:4-9)?
  - iv) His arrest (Mt 26:50-56)?
- b) Jesus says that his gentleness translates into his relationship with us.
  - i) What does it mean when he says, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light"?

*The "yoke" is a metaphor referring to a wooden device used to pair oxen for ploughing, etc. The metaphor was commonly used to represent the effort of observing the Jewish law as interpreted by the religious leaders. Jesus contrasts his teaching about the law as a light and easy yoke compared to the crushing burden of religious responsibilities created by the religious leaders of the day.*
  - ii) What is your experience of following Jesus? Do you experience his "yoke" as light and easy? Why or why not?
  - iii) How does that relate to our understanding of Jesus' gentle character?

If you can, take the time to look up these passages in the Home Group and let the members offer their observations based on the passages themselves rather than just their memory about these aspects of Jesus' life.

##### 2) Luke 23:32-39

- a) Is Jesus powerless in this situation? (see Mt 26:53) Explain.
- b) Make a list of the injuries and insults heaped upon Jesus in this passage.
- c) Some of the crowd, the soldiers, and even the two criminals crucified with Jesus taunt him by inviting him to prove his claims by coming down off the cross. Could Jesus have done this? If so, why doesn't he?
- d) How does Jesus demonstrate gentleness even while he is on the cross? Do you have any emotional reaction to this? (How does this make you feel?)
- e) How can we draw inspiration from his example? How do our experiences of insults and harm from people around us compare?

A legion would have 6,000 soldiers. Jesus claims to have 72,000 angels at his disposal.

### Discussion 2: About 15 minutes

#### Gentleness in Relationships

Read James 3:13-18

For this portion of the

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- 1) According to vs. 13, how is wisdom demonstrated?
- 2) James explains the nature of heavenly wisdom in vs. 17 & 18. Describe the character of the person who is wise with God's wisdom.
- 3) How does this description relate to the gentleness we see demonstrated by Jesus?
- 4) In vs. 14-16, James describes the opposite of gentle wisdom. What are the characteristics of the wisdom that he describes as "earthly"?
- 5) According to vs. 14 what should we do if we look in our heart and find that we are harbouring "bitter envy and selfish ambition"?
- 6) Left unchecked, what are the results of "bitter envy and selfish ambition"?
- 7) You could summarize this passage by now reading it from The Message:

*Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn't wisdom. It's the furthest thing from wisdom – it's animal cunning, devilish conniving. Whenever you're trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats.*

*Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterised by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honour.*

study use a "dynamic equivalent" translation such as NIV or NRSV.

"...do not boast about it (perhaps "embrace it") or deny the truth"...  
acknowledge and repent from it.

### Closer:

- Are we willing to commit ourselves to grow in gentleness this week?
- What kinds of choice will we need to make?
- Can we commit to pray for one another through the week and then report back any results when we meet again?