

“Gentleness”
Fruit of the Spirit
Downtown
July 24, 2022

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 11:29

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Introduction

I'm Ant. Welcome. FOTS. Gentleness.

Harshness. We live in an age where:

- The more forcefully and bluntly you state how you feel about a controversial issue, the more you're celebrated by those that hold the same beliefs as you.
- Not caring about the feelings of those that oppose your thoughts and beliefs is seen as a virtue
- It is scary for many to state how they feel about a particular issue because of how they will be insulted by others for their beliefs
- Harshness is very common... particularly when it comes to issues that are very controversial and that people are very emotionally connected to

HARSHNESS

Harsh(ness) -

- Ungentle and unpleasant in action or effect:
- Grim or unpleasantly severe; cruel

So when we engage with others in a way that is unpleasant (maybe even severely unpleasant) or cruel, we are being harsh... we are practicing harshness.

Harshness looks like

- We've now gone from disagreeing to insulting
- We've gone from sharing different ideas to us retaliating
 - I'm not primarily responding to challenge your thoughts... I'm not responding to defend myself and I'm now trying to make you feel the way that you made me feel
- **Aggressive.** Can look like us yelling getting louder and bigger with my body/body language.

It can be very difficult to not be harsh, particularly when we're angry... but I believe for many of us, particularly when it comes to conflict, we tend to err on the other side of the spectrum. Many of us tend to err on the side of Passivity.

PASSIVITY

Passivity -

- Refusal to take necessary or beneficial action
- Refusal to directly deal with a problem or conflict

Whereas harshness is the practice of engaging in a way that is cruel or unpleasantly severe. Passivity is the practice of not engaging at all or not engaging enough.

For some of us, in instances where its very important, or bare minimum, it would be very helpful for us to both engage with gentleness, we:

- Shrink back
- Don't want to fully engage
- Don't want to directly deal with whatever it is that needs to be dealt with.
- Become passive.

For many of us, that's our bigger problem. **And sometimes, we can tend to not just be passive and not just be harsh... but instead, we combine the two, and become passive-aggressive.**

Passive Aggressive. Passive Aggressiveness is when you express a negative feeling in an indirect manner. Y'all know what I'm talking about, right?

This can look like remaining very calm and subdued yet still trying to retaliate/get back at someone with our words/actions.

- "Yea, Ok, you're probably right since you're never wrong about anything."
- "Yea, let's do what you want to do since it's clear that my preferences don't matter to you at all."

Intentionally Short. (Pretend to Text)

"Hey, I just wanted to check in. You seemed a little upset. Hope you're good, and I hope we're good."

- ... "Fine."

Sometimes we are so afraid to truly express how we feel that we put all our negative feelings in a dot.

- No. Period.
- Ok. Period.
- Whatever you say. Period.

Or sometimes, instead of engaging directly with gentleness, we just use an emoji that shows that we are frustrated.

So instead of saying something like, "I'm offended because I feel like you never listen to me, and I feel unheard."

- "Eye roll emoji" ...

And instead of saying something like, "Even though I've brought this thing up to you again and again and told you how it makes me feel uncared about when you do it, you're doing it again right now, and again, I'm feeling uncared about..."

- “Its cool, do what you want to do... upside down smiley face emoji”

So often, instead of engaging with gentleness in a way that is honest and beneficial for the relationship, we become passive aggressive as a means of retaliating when we’ve been offended.

And sometimes... when we’re in situations where gentleness is necessary or beneficial, we’re not passive aggressive... **we’re just plain old passive.**

Believing False Teaching. A brother or sister that you’re in fellowship with is **clearly believing something that is against God’s Word**, and you want to tell them the truth, but you just don’t.

Unrepentant Sin. A brother or sister in Christ is **living in unrepentant sin**. They aren’t even trying to fight against their sin anymore. They have made peace with their sin, and you want to talk to them about it, but you just don’t.

Division In The Body. There’s division in the body of Christ between you and another brother or sister. Maybe one of you has been offended... And **you know you need to address it with them** to try to make it right, but you just don’t.

Harshness and Passivity both fall short of what the Holy Spirit wants for us. The Holy Spirit wants to produce gentleness in us.

GENTLENESS/MEEKNESS

(Gk) Gentleness - Mildness, humility, meekness

To be mild is to not be too sharp or extreme. This word combines humility with not being overly harsh or sharp. To be gentle/meek, doesn’t mean to be quiet. It doesn’t mean you don’t stand up for or advocate for yourself. It means you are able to engage with humility and restraint.

One of the best definitions I’ve ever heard about the term **gentleness** is that it means **to use the least amount of force necessary**. To use the least amount of force... necessary.

With all of that said, I want to use the rest of the time I have with you to give you a few points about Gentleness.

1. GENTLENESS REQUIRES GREAT DISCERNMENT/WISDOM

SURGERY

One of the things that comes to my mind when I think about biblical gentleness is surgery. A surgeon is rightly paid a lot of money to do something that **if anyone else tried to do it they’d be rightly arrested for it.**

A surgeon, often times uses a scalpel to cut someone's body open. Outside of the context of surgery, that's bare minimum, an assault charge. But when its done by a trained surgeon, its for the good.

A surgeon hurts you, to heal you - not to harm you.
A surgeon makes you bleed to make you better.

Skilled. A surgeon doesn't do more harm or use more force than is necessary, and they are so skilled with the scalpel and other instruments that they use that they are **able to successfully, time and time again, wound their patients to make them well.**

Family, that is a picture of gentleness... and when the fruit of Gentleness is being produced in us, **we are able to use our tongue, our words, and even our demeanor like scalpels in the hand of a surgeon.** We apply the necessary force, might even have to hurt someone's feelings from time to time, but we do so for their wellness and for their good.

Let me point your attention to a few scriptures that will help us have a robust understanding of gentleness....

Proverbs 27:6

Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

The bible tells us here that wounds from a friend are faithful... **they are reliable and trustworthy.** So we see here that God sees it as **good for us to actively engage with loved ones in a way that is good for them yet hurts their feelings sometimes.** It even goes so far as to say that enemies will give us many kisses. Often times its not for our good to flatter us and make us feel good about what we're doing.

And at the same time, in the same book of the bible, it says this...

Proverbs 16:1 CSB

A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath.

When we look at these verses together, it shows us that we need to be able to think through this with some **nuance.** We have an affirmation of speaking true things that might hurt the feelings of those we love... but at the same time we see that being gentle turns away anger and being harsh stirs up wrath.

So, we're called to say the truth that can offend people... but at the same time we see the bible affirming us responding with gentleness

We also see this play out in Paul's instructions to Timothy as He instructs Timothy on how to deal with people who are teaching false things about God...

2 Timothy 2:24-25

24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness.

Do you know how to kindly teach someone you disagree with, without being quarrelsome?

How are you at correcting people you disagree with with gentleness?

In a disagreement... “How do I know how strong I need to get to this point?”

“If gentleness is using the least amount of force necessary, how do I know how much is too much?”

“I don’t want to stir up wrath and anger in them, but at the same time, this might be a time where I need to give a friend a faithful wound because I love them, and that might make them mad. How do we navigate this?”

I want to give you a few principles that I think can serve as guardrails for us as we try to discern what engaging with gentleness often looks like.

To grow in discernment...

1. INTERROGATE YOUR MOTIVES

Ask yourself questions like, “**Am I doing this for their good or for selfish reasons**”

Motivated by convenience.

It can be **easy for us to want to confront people because it will make our lives easier** if they stop doing that thing, and oftentimes, as Christians, we care more about that than we do their growth in the Lord.

Motivated by fear. And on the other end of the spectrum, sometimes we don’t want to bring up a particular issue with a brother or sister, and **we tell ourselves that it's because we don't want to be overly harsh or judgmental, when the truth is we're terrified of that person's response**, and we don’t want them to be angry with us.

Whether we’re leaning towards passivity or harshness, we need to interrogate our motives and ask ourselves the question, “Am I doing this for their good or for selfish reasons?”

Ask yourself, “**Am I attempting to retaliate right now?**”

This one is for my truth-speakers, my straight shooters... my “I-give-it-to-you-straight, no chasers” people. **Do you find yourself really just shooting straight with people when they’ve done something to bother or frustrate you?**

A question for you to ask yourself is, “Would I still see this as something they need to hear if I weren’t currently frustrated?”

I’m asking you to ask yourself this question because it's **funny how we can become extremely well-versed in other people’s flaws and sin when they bring up something that we’ve done wrong**. If that is true for you, you should be careful because your sudden **recollection of their mistakes could very well be your anger loading your tongue with ammunition** to strike back because your feelings are hurt.

You should ask yourself, “**Am I attempting to retaliate right now?**”

To grow in discernment you can (1) interrogate your motives, and you can...

2. PRAY BEFORE YOU SPEAK

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

At one point or another in my marriage, I have been guilty of every way I have brought up today of how to not practice biblical gentleness. I've:

- Been overly passive and overly harsh
- Been passive aggressive
- Retaliated at times and afraid to speak up at other times

Personal Story. I've heard my wife say on a number of occasions that **the way conflict is handled in our marriage changed the day I started taking the time to pray in the middle of the conflict.** She's said to me and I've heard her say to others that after I take the time to pray, I am more aware of and ready to apologize for my flaws. I speak in a tone that is more conducive to us being reconciled and getting on the same page.

In a word, I am more meek and wise and discerning after I pray. Going to God and pouring out my heart to Him about whatever I'm frustrated about and how I'm feeling at the time causes me to see everything more clearly and be more gentle.

I'm In Denial. In those times I ask God to help me to see where I'm right and where I'm wrong. Often I start telling God about all the ways I think she's wrong and then, praise God, He opens my eyes to ways that I'm wrong that I had been so in denial of that I, as far as I can tell, didn't know I was in the wrong. I had tricked myself into thinking that my perspective or my motives or my actions weren't off or wrong, and through prayer, in the moment, God opened my eyes to see with much greater clarity... and I am grateful to Him for it. Pray before you speak.

James 1:19

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger

Ya know I wonder if James had written this in our day, if He would have said *"be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to post..."*

I believe we'd be benefited by not only praying before we speak, but also praying before we post, **"Pray before you post."**

I brought up earlier how when it comes to controversial topics that cause very emotionally charged conversations, we are often applauded for stating things as blunt and sometimes as harsh as we possibly can. **The willingness to disregard the feelings of those that oppose our views is often seen as a virtue** in our culture today.

****Story about sister never praying before posting things****

When James says to be slow to speak, he isn't trying to tell them how much to say or how much they shouldn't say. He's instructing them on the speed with which they should speak. He's telling them to pause sometimes. Listen well. Don't let your anger or frustration cause you to say something before you've had time to consider everything.

So family, let us be a people that pray to the one that generously gives out wisdom and ask Him for guidance before you post something about the controversial topic that is on your heart. **As Christians, we don't post like the world does.** Even if what we post is true, we have to ask ourselves, "Does the way that I'm saying this true thing conflict with the fruit of gentleness/meekness that the Lord wants to produce in me?"

We should Pray before we speak and before we post.

2. GENTLENESS REQUIRES GREAT STRENGTH

There are many who see meekness and gentleness as weakness. I even read that it was commonly believed in Paul's day that meekness was not a virtue. We see it here in the list of the fruit of the Spirit, and we know that it's godly, but not everyone sees it that way.

To engage with gentleness and be slow to speak even when others are being harsh can look like and feel like weakness. But if you think about it, nothing is farther from the truth.

Flying off the handle and being harsh with those that you love because they are harsh with you, doesn't require any strength. If anything, if that's how you naturally respond, **it means other people have the power to control you.** Whether or not you act out of character is completely at the mercy of how people treat you... and that's a scary thing in a world full of people that might possibly mistreat you. The truth is practicing harshness is much more of a sign of weakness than gentleness is.

The same for practicing passivity. It doesn't require strength to avoid a difficult but beneficial conversation. It doesn't require strength to be passive aggressive and express frustration without directly dealing with it.

Don't believe the lie that the world tells us that it's virtuous and strong for you to just say whatever is on your heart without any restraint or caution or second thoughts. **Family, that's weak. Hear me on this... that's often how young children communicate when they're angry or frustrated.**

But gentleness... gentleness requires a strength that is great and unique. I've met people that **can lift 300lbs, but can't control their tongue and their words.** I've met people that can lead a business that brings in millions of dollars, but can't practice gentleness in an emotionally-charged argument.

Why? Because in many cases it requires more strength to restrain a large amount of force than it does to exert a large amount of force. I'd **rather have to get behind a car and push it to get it going with some good momentum** than to get in front of that same car and have to stop it once it has momentum.

Quick argument example. Y'all know how it is when you're in an argument and you gotta ****Inhale + Exhale | press lips together****. Y'all know how difficult that is. Y'all know how much strength it requires to, in a heated moment, be slow to speak and consider how you're communicating to make sure you're practicing humility and gentleness.

A Strong Christian. The Christian in whom's life the Holy Spirit produces gentleness, is a strong Christian. They are empowered by a strength greater than their own. The Christian that rejects harshness and passivity and instead practices engaging consistently with humility and gentleness is someone that is **not easily manipulated or baited into a response**. You can do whatever to them and often they will not be brought to your level of harshness, but they will be able to speak honestly and directly to you with humility and control.

They are able to **take offense after offense in this world and maintain a godly composure** that allows them to continue to represent Him even in the face of harshness. By the power of the Holy Spirit **they are a stabilizing, peace-creating force in a Christian community**. They often can take helpful and wise steps towards resolving conflict they have with others, and they can often help others to resolve their conflict as well.

They are strong in the Lord, and their gentleness is a huge blessing to the church. **In a word, they are godly...**

... and that leads me to my third and final point....

3. GENTLENESS IS CHRISTLIKE

I want us to notice how Jesus describes Himself in **Matthew 11:29**

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

He says He's gentle. This is the **adjective form of the same word that the apostle Paul uses in Galatians**. I love that Jesus describes Himself this way because it really does give us perspective. We see often times that Jesus does engage with people in that way that is direct and clear and oftentimes He says and does things that are very offensive to people. So, His words here make it clear that being gentle doesn't mean not having a backbone.

Gethsemane. And at the same time, these words remind me of the night Jesus was taken away to be crucified when the mob **armed with swords and clubs** came at him, and Peter went and cut one of the men's ear off, and Jesus heals the man's ear. The man is coming to kill Jesus. This is a man that has united and rallied with other men and grabbed swords and clubs with **the plan to forcefully, kidnap, abuse, and murder Jesus**. Jesus knows this. And yet... Jesus heals the man.

This man's intention is to take Jesus' life, and Jesus' intention is to bless this man's life. This man came with an armed crowd. **He came prepared for a fight, and honestly Peter just gave that man what He came for.** And Jesus gave that man meekness and gentleness.

That man was guilty of egregious sin against Jesus, and Jesus not only restrains Himself from giving that man what He deserves right then and there, He gives that man love and healing.

That man had hostility towards Jesus, and Jesus had gentleness towards Him.
That man had made Himself into an enemy of Jesus and Jesus loved Him like a friend.

Jesus showed mighty restraint towards, not just Him, but also that whole crowd who came to Him that day to take Him by force. They came prepared to use force. Jesus was there to show restraint.

The Cross. And then less than 24hrs later, on the cross, He blessed us with gentleness in a way that's greater than any other act of gentleness that has ever been displayed. He died for our sins. He took the full judgment and wrath and condemnation of God that we had earned onto Himself so that we could for all eternity be blessed by the gentleness of God.

Romans 5:10

10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,

You see what was true of that man that night that came to take Jesus **is also true of us.**

We are guilty of egregious sin against Jesus, and Jesus not only restrains the judgment from God that we deserve, He also gives us love and healing.

In our sin, we are hostile towards God, yet God is gentle with us.
We made ourselves enemies of God's, and Jesus loves us as His friends.

He's So Good To Us Now

And even now, yall He is so good to us...

Even now, He engages with us through His Word and Through His Spirit... confronting us in our sin, being honest with us about our sin...

But He does it in love. Why, because He's gentle.

So, for His people, yes we feel conviction, but we know that He has taken away our condemnation. So yes, He confronts us, but He does not condemn us... because He is gentle with us.

Even when life is harsh with us... our God is gentle with us. Always with us. Always engaging with us with gentleness.