

Matthew 11:25-30; Romans 12:9-21

“A Fruitful Life of Gentleness”

The fruit of the Spirit. We are examining each of these. What is gentleness? We’re not just asking this in order to observe the quality of gentleness we can see in our own lives, but whether we find the real, vibrant connection to Jesus Christ in our life! We can *imitate* gentleness through our best efforts – or gentleness is what we are because we are conforming our lives in submission to our amazing Savior!

Let’s use this time today to see if you’re living into all the joy and peace God has for you!

In what areas of your life have you experienced the spiritual fruit of gentleness? Are you yielding your life to the Lord so that gentleness is taking root and growing?

This term for “gentleness” that the Bible uses to describe the “fruit” of God’s Spirit is the most difficult to translate into English of all the fruit.

We’ve been examining the Christian life for the past several weeks, looking at the way we are shaped by the “Fruit of the Spirit” with the presence of God in our hearts! Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. And today: Gentleness. The Greek word that’s used here may mean gentleness – but it is not weakness! It is a gentleness whose power is harnessed! Think about the powerful force of flowing water that’s harnessed in such a way to generate electricity! This word is taken from the image of a wild animal tamed to use its strength and potential, so that we are shaped by the Holy Spirit to yield to God’s desires!

Other words that come to mind are “firm,” “bold,” “focused,” and “unwavering,” all these words braided into kindness and love. It’s a tough idea on which to get a handle because this fruit that’s formed in our lives is both strong and tender, powerful but humble. It is the gentleness of a mother bear who protects her cubs from dangers in the wilderness. Certainly gentle with her own offspring, while protecting them from harm or injustice.

Did you see the movie *The Blindside* about Michael Oher? Michael played professional football blocking in the trenches for the quarterback and the runners. It’s a tough position where people get slapped, beaten, punched, and mauled. It’s a place for only the strongest, biggest guys on the field!

Michael is a huge human, but one of the gentlest men you would meet, loving and kind to his family. But on the football field he’s all out mayhem after his Momma pushed him to *protect* his teammates!

It’s Michael’s kind of gentle humility we receive with the Spirit of Christ! Gentleness has a humble state of mind. But this doesn’t mean the person is weak or cowardly. Identifying with the least, the last, and the lost among us doesn’t bother the gentle person. He desires to be a friend and to help anyone as much as possible.

We’re talking about a term, “gentleness,” that was never used for God in the Old Testament! In fact, in ancient times, the Greek word was never used as a compliment! But Jesus used it to describe Himself when He said, **“Come to Me ...for I am gentle and humble in heart.”**

Evidence of His humility is undeniable when we link this idea to the first Christmas! The God who came to earth came not in a raging tornado or devouring fire. Unimaginably, the Maker of the Universe shrank down so small as to become a zygote, a single fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye, a blastocyst that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape, enlarging

cell by cell inside a nervous teenage girl. This is a God of humble power!

Near the end of His life, Jesus enters Jerusalem for the final time “humble and mounted on a donkey,” a peaceful entrance – in sharp contrast to what the fanatics wanted!

Throughout His ministry, Jesus practiced a different kind of authority known as servant leadership. At His last supper, Jesus gave the example of leadership by washing His disciples’ feet. Later, the Apostle Paul instructed the Church: **Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.** Philippians 2:5-8

Although He was God’s Son and was more powerful than any other leader in the world, healing the sick, driving out demons, was recognized as both Teacher and Lord, and had power over the wind and sea ...even reversing the powers of death, He served the people He came to love and save!

Servant leadership begins, for us, in the mind and heart. That’s why Philippians at Chapter 2 challenges us, **“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...”**

Without the mind of Christ, we will be self-focused and oblivious to the needs of others. Servant leaders are sensitive observers as well as being excellent at meeting needs. So with the fruit of the Spirit, we train ourselves to see the needs of others.

Servant leadership is not so much what we talk about being as it is who we are in submission to Christ! When we have Christ’s humility and look for ways to serve rather than to be served – that is servant leadership.

A true servant leader is a strong leader who believes that all people have equal value before God. So a servant leader sets an example of Christian leadership by putting the health and welfare of those he or she leads first.

Jeff Jernigan tells the story about humble gentleness he found in a new friend: I’ve known Guy for less than two years but liked him immediately. He’s laid back, not a fancy dresser, and shows a real interest in others. He doesn’t talk much about himself, yet knows how to be appropriately transparent and vulnerable. He doesn’t wear his emotions on his sleeve, but comes across as real and genuine.

Eventually I learned that Guy is an attorney who owns one of the most successful law firms in his area of discipline. No one facing him either professionally or outside the courtroom would mistake him for anything less than a man’s man. He also owns a restaurant and expensive real estate. But within a group he’s just one of the guys. Guy will be the first to tell you he’s not perfect – and he’ll be honest about what that means. He doesn’t hide behind false humility, and I marvel at how easily he fits in without pretension.

I’ve learned from others that Guy has been behind some of the most successful ministries in this country, he’s legendary in his generosity, and gives more that isn’t tax deductible than what is acknowledged with receipts. Active in missions, he wants the backseat support position and views his role as making others successful, not himself. Guy demonstrates that solid success doesn’t need to advertise. (Jeff Jernigan; PK Devotional; June 26, 2009)

Here’s a man who’s living out the Fruitful Life of Gentleness as it’s described in our Bible lesson today. **[READING Romans 12:9-21]** As you read, pick a favorite adage or piece of

advice:

⁹ Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. ¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

"I will take revenge;
I will pay them back," says the LORD.

²⁰ Instead,

"If your enemies are hungry, feed them.
If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals
of shame on their heads."

²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Here's a whole chapter that would do us all good to read and reread until we find ourselves being molded by these instructions that are so important to family and community and Church! The idea of gentleness is all over this chapter, and it is a gentleness that allows others to grow, to succeed, to be fulfilled and satisfied!

So then, how do we get to this place of a gentle, humble heart?

It is only those with a teachable heart who will find a transformation of the inner life. If we are unwilling to listen, we are incapable of learning.

Now there are other aspects of being a good student, including intelligence, discipline, focus, and determination, but the one characteristic that is essential is humility. Without humility, – and here's our KEY today – without the idea that we *need* to learn, we need to grow, we need to change, there's no reason to think about the Fruit of the Spirit!

We might say humility is about self-awareness to the point where I understand my strengths and my weaknesses, and I don't mind disclosing weakness and fears or faults and sins – at least to God ...and dare I share together with you?

That would define gentleness, in that we fulfill the Biblical command: **Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.** James 5:16

"Come," Jesus said. "Come to Me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens." Jesus is interested and wants *you!*

There's never been any other man or woman who made the invitation and the promise

Jesus could dare to make: “Come to Me ...and I will give you rest!” Who else could possibly utter that promise? Jesus has the power to give what He alone can offer! “Learn from Me!” He said. In fact, let us be bound together!

It’s a great invitation to this generation: “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.”

But why should a person take up the yoke of Christ?

To “take a yoke” in the early days of Christianity meant to become a disciple. When we submit to Christ, we are partnered to Him. And surely the idea of the yoke refers to an oxen's yoke. The yoke was a wooden collar-like harness placed on the neck and shoulders of the oxen. It was used for tying the ropes of a plough to the oxen or for tying whatever load he had to pull. It was extremely important that the yoke be fitted for the shoulders of the oxen to prevent rubbing the flesh raw and causing sores. At first the oxen might have rebelled against the presence of the yoke, but he soon learned that it eased the burden of pulling. The yoke refers to your own life and work while we live here.

Some owners of oxen were mean and harsh both in their training and in their working of the oxen, but not Christ. He was meek and lowly, considerate and understanding, mild and gentle, longsuffering and encouraging to every person who came to Him. Jesus accepts the willing servant, however imperfect we may be. He was saying that His yoke, His life and task, are fitted for each of you. His yoke is just what you need, and it’s the gentlest way through life for you!

He wants you and me to learn from Him! And He’s willing and ready!

INVITATION: So will you “**present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**” Will you refuse to **be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect?** Romans 12:1-2

By the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus will work in your heart and within the Church as a whole! He is not harsh, contrary to what you may have heard; but He is meek, mild, gentle! His purpose is to sanctify us so that we are transformed into His own likeness, so that we rise above the experiences we have with disappointment in this world to find rest in the gentleness of the Father’s arms ...and rest in the gentleness we are becoming!

Is it okay to pray for this gentleness to come into your life? Absolutely! And this is the day to make that prayer known to the Father, acknowledging that you are ready to learn from Him as you yield to God ...your will – until it becomes as His will!

PRAYER:

O Lord God,

In prayer I launch far out into the eternal world, and on the wings of eagles, for there is nothing that intimidates the heart’s desire for You! It is in prayer that I see myself as near to nothing, even as I chase after You in all Your beauty and glory!

It is in prayer that all things here below seem to vanish, and nothing of this world’s pleasures seems to match Your desires for the human heart and the salvation of others!

It is in prayer that all my worldly worries, fears or anxieties disappear – and are as significant as a distant wisp of cloud.

It is in prayer that my soul comes alive with what You are doing in Your Church, and I long to see us all caught up in that great mission!

It is in prayer that I am lifted above the frowns and vague flatteries – so that I might **taste the fruit of heaven**, connecting to Your eternal bliss. How I want to give myself to You with all my heart and to be Yours forever!

It is in prayer that I can place all my concerns into Your hands, to be at Your disposal, having no will but that which is to please You!

It is in prayer that I can intercede for friends, for servants, for sinners and for the Church – as a child to a father, as a lover to the beloved!

Help me to be all prayer and never cease praying – for we know that it is in prayer that we are filled with the fruit of Your very being! In Jesus' name. Amen