Video Clip

Slide 1: Title

Cartoons, football stadiums, workplaces, music, toy stores, movies, living rooms, kitchens, computer games, schools, novels, date nights, network news. What do all these have in common? At least one thing: they are all primary venues for the violence , both real and fictional, that permeates our lives. Even if one argues that fictional violence merely reflects the violent society in which we live, one has to admit that such portrayals do little to offer other options for resolving conflict. The biblical qualities of meekness and gentleness are misunderstood and undervalued in today's society of extremes— where all too often people tend to angrily overreact. In our culture of outrage, gentleness runs counter-culture. We are a “fight fire with fire” generation. How else do you explain mean social media posts and nasty comment sections under online articles? In our world, outrage is passion; outrage is strength! This summer we have been going through the Fruit of the Spirit. My job today is to ask and hopefully start to answer the question; How do you cultivate gentleness in a culture like ours?

Slide 2: What is Gentleness?

Let’s first start by discussing what gentleness is. The word Paul uses for “gentleness” in Galatians 5:22-23 is prautes (Prou-Tace), which has the same root as the word Jesus uses to describe those who will inherit the earth in Matthew 5. It’s usually translated as “meek,” “mild,” or “gentle.” But Strong’s Greek Concordance says that the word “refers to exercising God’s strength under His control . . . demonstrating power without undue harshness. . . . The English term ‘meek’ often lacks this blend . . . of gentleness and strength.” Gentleness is more than a personal disposition. It's an outgrowth of love. It is when you care enough to choose not to be harsh, rash, angry, or rough. I loved singing the Bumblebee song to Lily when she was little. You know the one: “I'm bringing home a baby bumblebee, Won't my mommy be so proud of me, I'm bringing home a baby bumblebee, Ouch! He stung me! I'm squishing up a baby bumblebee, Won't my mommy be so proud of me!” You see little kids singing this song you see their hands tightly clasped. As adults we can see why the bee stung, it was scared, being held tightly in the small hands. As they grow, we teach children to hold things gently. Gentleness is when you learn and use the best way to hold an egg, a butterfly or a bumblebee.

Besides understanding what gentleness is, it is also important for us to clarify what gentleness is not. To be gentle is not the same as being gullible or naive. Christ told His disciples to be wise as serpents, while being harmless as doves. We would be foolish to be accommodating with people to the point that wicked people take advantage of our gentleness, and manipulate us for their own purposes. Gentleness must always be applied with wisdom. Jesus Christ who is called the Lamb of God, did not commit Himself to everyone who claimed to believe in Him, because as Lord he knew all people and what motives they had for coming to him.

So, the question comes back to us, How do you cultivate that kind of gentleness in a culture like ours? Gentleness doesn’t come naturally. These types of behavior changes take place from a heart that’s at ease and set on God. Gentleness is something Christians must learn. It is a trait that is godly, and as His children God expects us to become as gentle, as He is. Do we respond in a rage or with trust?

Slide 3: 2 Chronicles 10:6-16

The Bible gives us an excellent example of a king who was not gentle in dealing with his people and the result of it was that he lost most of his kingdom. According to 2 Chronicles 10:6-16, when Rehoboam (Ray A Bow am), the son of King Solomon came to the throne of Israel, his people requested him to ease the heavy taxation that his father had imposed on them to finance his massive building projects. Rehoboam first asked the wise older men for their advice and they said to him, 'If you are kind to these people and try to please them by speaking gently with them, they will be your servants forever.' Their advice was that king Rehoboam would gain more by being gentle toward the people.

But Rehoboam did not listen to them. Instead, he listened to the advice of his younger friends who told him to be tough, saying to the people, 'My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist. So if my father made your workload heavy, I’ll make it even heavier! If my father disciplined you with whips, I’ll do it with scorpions!' King Rehoboam followed this very unwise advice and lost 10 tribes which broke away and formed another kingdom.

To be gentle does not mean that one is weak or unfit to lead. It also doesn’t mean we must always give in to others, even on issues where we must stand firm and uncompromising. Whenever moral principles are at stake, we cannot afford to be swayed by others. In the history of Israel there was one king who was just the opposite of Rehoboam.

Slide 4: 2 Chronicles 19:2

While Rehoboam was not gentle enough, this king was much too gentle even with the enemies of God. This king was Jehoshaphat. He was a good and god-fearing king, but he adopted a friendly attitude toward King Ahab, who was the most wicked king of Israel. Ahab married Jezebel who brought Baal worship into Israel. He persecuted the prophets of God and coveted the property of Naboth.

Jehoshaphat accepted Ahab's invitation to help him fight a battle. He embarked on a joint shipping venture with Ahab. He even had his son marry Ahab's daughter. But each of these things ended in disaster, as a prophet from God rebuked Jehoshaphat, 'Why did you help the wicked? Why have you loved those who hate the Lord? This is why the Lord is angry with you.' (2 Chronicles 19:2) Let us therefore learn to exercise gentleness with wisdom, standing firm on moral principles.

Slide 5: Quote

How do we do that? Jesus comes and teaches us the correct way to be gentle. Meekness is seen in Jesus because he had the infinite resources of God at his command. Jesus had rights. Jesus had power. Jesus had the ability to do many things. But rather than enforce his rights, exert his power, and do whatever he wanted, Jesus acted with gentleness and in the best interests of the people. He taught the disciples this same lesson. Like Elijah, they wanted to burn evildoers. They mistakenly thought ferocity was the ideal behavior for a servant of God. As He had with Elijah, God intervened, through Jesus Christ, to show them they were wrong. Friends of James and John called those two “the Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). The Gospel of Luke shows this was an appropriate nickname for the pair. Jesus and His disciples were traveling to Jerusalem, and on the way they sought lodging in a Samaritan city. Historians tell us of long-standing enmity between the Samaritan and the Jewish people. Samaritans refused to allow Jews to enter their city (Luke 9:51-53).

Because they feel snubbed, James and John say they would like to duplicate Elijah’s miracle of destruction by fire. Jesus is put off by their attitudes, and His unequivocal response comes through in the statement that “He turned and rebuked them.” Jesus lets James and John know that their attitude is not right because the “Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (Luke 9:54-56).

In the biblical accounts of Elijah and the Sons of Thunder, Christians can learn an important lesson-that we are to be predominantly gentle people, just as our Savior, Jesus Christ, was gentle. In Jesus’ many statements about Himself, one of the most memorable is found in Matthew 11:28-30. Here He plainly states that He is “gentle and lowly in heart.”

In His message to His disciples in Matthew 5, commonly called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus honors specific people: “Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are the meek . . . Blessed are the merciful . . . Blessed are the pure in heart . . . Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:1-9). We see the quality of gentleness woven through the fabric of the message. This trait stands in the Bible as the proper temperament for a servant of God. People who breathe “threats and murder” miss the point of their calling. Heavy-handed tactics are like a hefty ax that lacks a keen edge. They are more suited to bruise than to prune.

A gentle spirit comes from having an accurate scriptural view of ourselves and of others. We must see ourselves as sinners who are saved by grace alone. If not for what God has done in our lives, we would not be what we are right now. We must realize how gentle and gracious God has been to us, to forgive us our sins when we really deserved to be punished. How gracious God is to give us eternal life and a home in heaven, when we really deserved eternal death in hell. How blessed we are to have the privilege of walking with Him, when we really deserved to be left to continue walking in our own ways of destruction!

Slide 6: Quote

When we understand how immensely we have been forgiven, and how intensely we have been loved and saved by God, then we will surely be all the more willing to show that same forgiveness, that same love and the same compassion to those around us and be gentle in dealing with them. When we understand how God had such deep concern and interest in our lives, then we would be all the more willing to show the same deep concern for and interest in the lives of others.

The next step to cultivate gentleness is to train our minds to regard the lives of people around us as being very precious and valuable. If you were given a piece of fragile porcelain so rare and costly as to make it irreplaceable, how carefully and gently you would handle it! If you were to hold a little new-born baby in your hands and marvel at the life that God has infused into this bundle of joy, how tenderly and gently you would carry it!

Now exactly how valuable are the lives of people around us? Each and every person is of priceless value because each person is created in the image of God. Each and every person also receives life, health and sustenance from God and if God considers them as being precious enough to receive all of these things from Him, we would be insulting God if we did not value them too. Let us learn to appreciate the value of people around us, and regard every person we meet as a special person who deserves our attention and our interest in him.

And we have an additional reason to be gentle with those who are saved - because God has considered them valuable enough to send His only begotten Son to die for them. They have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and we must therefore be careful how we handle any brother or sister in Christ. We must be very gentle with them because they are precious in God's sight.

Once we have gained this accurate scriptural view of others we can then go on to think of what being gentle with them means. Firstly, being gentle means being careful not to make them stumble. And if any believer offends you or sins against you, do not seek to retaliate, but be very willing to forgive him or her. In Ephesians 4:32 God's Word says 'Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.'

Slide 7: Philippians 2:4

Secondly, being gentle means putting the welfare of others, above oneself. In Philippians 2:4, God's Word says, 'Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others.' In order for us to be sincere in seeking the welfare of others we must be willing to see things from their point of view. We must be willing to understand them well, to be sensitive to their needs, to sympathize with them, feel their feelings, and even think their thoughts. In other words, we should try our best to put ourselves in their shoes. Then we would be able to think about the best way we can respond to them, and ways in which we can really be of help to them.

Now it takes some conscious effort for anyone to cultivate this ability and even more to keep up this interest, this concern for others in order to be gentle with them. On our own we would fail to do this for very long, because our tendency is usually to be concerned only for ourselves. But remember that gentleness is part of the fruit of the Spirit. When one is filled with the Spirit, one receives the special grace to keep being concerned for others and to be gentle in our dealings with them.

Now that we have seen how we may cultivate a gentle spirit, we may proceed to consider where we need to apply gentleness:

Slide 8: Where do we need to apply gentleness

We need this kind of gentleness first of all in serving God and others. Those who are in any area of service, whether as a grow group leader or on a service team or as a confirmation mentor need to cultivate gentleness. A ministry characterized by gentleness is a ministry that will edify people, and provides a good environment for spiritual growth. We also need to be understanding, not demanding, when we are the ones being served.

Secondly, we need gentleness in dealing with our loved ones. It is sometimes surprising and even ironic to find that people are the least gentle with the ones who are closest to them, because they tend to take them for granted, and expect too much from them. Let us be careful to be just as gentle, if not more gentle, with our parents, with our brothers and sisters, with our spouse, and with our own children. Gentleness rightly begins at home.

Thirdly, we need gentleness in warning and rebuking others, when they have done something wrong. According to Galatians 6:1, ‘if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness.’ We should never use a 'holier than thou' tone whenever we give such warning, but rather a tone of urgent loving concern for the welfare of the erring brother or sister. Even when church discipline is applied to a believer for sins that are publicly known, the ultimate object of that discipline process is not to condemn the person, but rather to restore him or her to fellowship when true repentance is demonstrated. We need to be be TENDER without SURRENDER.

Do you seek to resolve problems in the gentlest way possible, or do you simply swing the sledge-hammer without regard for collateral damage? Proverbs 15:1 “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Gentleness flows out of humility.

Slide : Gentleness desires that we do no harm.

We look to the apostle Paul in action. How did he treat people, especially those who often failed? In 1 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul gives us a glimpse of how he treated others: "We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children." Parents have to be both loving and tough. Gentleness is a strong hand with a soft touch. It is a tender, compassionate approach not judgemental toward others' weaknesses and limitations. A gentle person still speaks truth, sometimes even painful truth, but in doing so guards his tone so the truth can be well received. Like the other spiritual fruit, gentleness is an aspect of God's character which Christians take on as they follow Christ. The fruit of 'gentleness' isn't about being wishy-washy or unassertive. Instead, it's a refusal to use power to harm anyone, an unwillingness to cut and slash at people, wounding them for vengeance, spite or control. Gentleness desires that we do no harm.

Slide : 3 steps

Ask God this week to help you in three areas:

1. When someone serves me, let me be understanding, not demanding.

2. When someone disagrees with me, let me be TENDER without SURRENDER.

3. When someone disappoints me, let me be GENTLE, not judgmental.

Three great steps…of action…to live out loud and allow the HOLY SPIRIT to manifest Gentleness in your life! Blessings to you and pray for me as I seek to be more gentle…thus more like Jesus. I, too, am a work in progress.

Go today with gentleness in your heart and mercy and kindness on your lips. Amen