

INTRODUCTION

Orange you glad you came to church today? Fruit is the outward expression of an inner nature. When you see an orange hanging on a tree, you can safely assume, that's an orange tree. The reason you can identify the tree is because of its fruit. Jesus said the same thing about people. He said, "By their fruit you will recognize them." (Matthew 7:16) When you see these nine personality characteristics in someone, you can safely assume that they are a Jesus tree...I mean a Jesus-person.

Let's look at our list again. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

Today we're going to talk about the fruit of gentleness; it is also translated "meekness" in some Bibles. So, in this message, I will be using both words interchangeably to describe the same fruit. To better understand a word, it's helpful to know what the opposite meaning is. What would you consider to be the opposite of gentleness? The opposite of gentleness is roughness and violence. Our hearts go out to the victims of the terrible shooting rampage in Aurora, Colorado. I received an email yesterday that the brother of a friend of mine was in the theater with his two teenage daughters. They survived, but my friend's brother died in the shooting. If there was ever a time when our nation needs to be filled with people who are filled with the Fruit of the Spirit, it is now. The moral fiber of our nation continues to unravel, and we need to seek the face of God for a national spiritual awakening.

That kind of mass violence is the opposite of kindness, goodness, and gentleness. The world without Christ considers gentle people to be weak people, losers, doormats. A few years ago, Robert Ringer wrote two best-selling books that even encouraged people to be aggressive in the dog-eat-dog business world. He wrote *Winning Through Intimidation* and then he followed it with *Looking Out for #1*. But what the world needs desperately is more gentleness. People are fragile: They must be handled with care.

As we think about gentleness, I want you to ask yourself two important questions.

I. AM I STRONG ENOUGH TO BE GENTLE?

If you learn anything about gentleness today, please understand that real gentleness requires supernatural strength. In fact, the way to be gentle is to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me clear up two misunderstandings about gentleness or meekness.

A. Gentleness isn't weakness—It's strength under control

The Greek word for meekness and gentleness is *praus*. It's the word Jesus used in the Beatitudes when He said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5). The best way to understand the meaning of this word is to know how it was used in the Greek language. It didn't mean "weak;" in fact it was used to describe a wild, powerful horse that had been trained to be ridden. We call it "breaking" a horse. A trainer has to break the stubborn, unbridled nature

of the horse in order to get it to a place where it will submit to a bridle and a saddle. When the Greeks referred to a horse that had been trained, they used a verb to say the horse had been “meeked.” They used the exact word, *praus*, the same word used for the fruit of the Spirit of gentleness.

Corbin Preifert, is a member of our church and a great guy who is still sharing his faith at 92 years young. A couple of years ago, he invited me to drive him up to Mt. Pleasant to visit the Preifert factory. They make farm equipment that is sold all around the world. It was an interesting trip and I got to meet Corbin’s nephew, Bill, who now runs the company. I also got to meet Radar, a Belgian draft horse, who, for a few years held the Guinness World record for being the tallest horse in the world. They measure horses to their shoulders, and Radar’s shoulders tower at 6’ 7 ½ inches, and he weighs around 2,400 pounds. When he lifts his head, he could bump it on a basketball rim. As I walked up to this massive horse, I was amazed by his gentleness. Even though that horse had the strength to hurt me, or even kill me, fortunately, he had been “meeked.” He walked over to me and let me rub his huge nose and pat him on his massive neck. His hoofs were seemed to be as big around my head; he could have crushed my feet if he had stepped on me. But he was completely gentle—a gentle giant.

That’s a picture of meekness—great strength under control. The great Methodist preacher, Ralph Sockman wrote, “Nothing is so strong as gentleness. And nothing is more gentle than real strength. It is a soft touch with a strong hand.”

B. Gentleness isn’t cowardice—It’s the courage to surrender

The Bible is full of paradoxes. And Jesus said if you try to gain your life you’ll lose it, but if you truly lose your life in surrender to Him, that’s when you gain your life.

I showed you a picture of a big horse, how about a picture of a big man? When my daughters were growing up we watched the movie “The Princess Bride” so many times that we had memorized many of the lines. “Hello, my name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.” When I performed my daughter Jenni’s wedding, I knew I had to insert some humor or we would both be blubbering. So I started the ceremony with a line from the movie, “Mawwiage. Mawwiage is what brings us together today.” It worked.

My favorite character in the movie was Fezzik, played by André the Giant. Andre stood 7’ 5” tall and weighed over 500 pounds. He first made his name in professional wrestling, and for a time was the highest paid wrestler in history. I’m about to give a spoiler alert, so if you don’t want to hear it, cover your ears. Okay. Here it is: Professional wrestling is fake. It’s rigged. The same people who think Elvis is still alive also believe professional wrestling is real.

I say that because although André the Giant seemed like a ferocious monster in the wrestling ring, those who knew him best said it was only an act. Outside the ring he was kindhearted and generous. He once refused tickets to a Broadway show because he knew the people sitting behind him wouldn’t be able to see, and he didn’t want to spoil it for them.

André died of congestive heart failure at 47 while in Paris for his father's funeral. Before he died, he said his favorite role was the gentle, loving giant named Fezzik.

Gentleness is displayed when you have the power to subdue someone, but you choose not to. Through the years I have been involved with FCA and in the 1980s I was blessed to be the camp pastor for the National FCA camp in Black Mountain, Carolina. Other speakers that week were Coach Tom Landry and NFL star Reggie White, both of whom are in heaven now.

But one of my favorite athletes there that week was a guy who did Karate for Christ. I can't remember his name, but he put on an amazing demonstration of breaking boards and concrete blocks, and he even jump-kicked a cap off the head of Reggie White.

He told a story that really illustrates meekness. He said one night he had been putting on a demonstration at an inner city gym in Philadelphia. As he was walking back to his car in an alley a young punk confronted him with a knife and demanded his wallet. As he stood there sizing up his foe, his mind went through several plans of how he could disarm the guy, break his arm, or even kill him. He was thinking, "This guy picked the wrong man to try to rob." But then he realized that this kid was pretty scared. So instead of hurting him, he just assumed a fighting stance and yelled, "Hi-YAH!" And then he turned and ran out the other end of the ally. When he turned around the punk was gone. He had the strength and the skill to hurt that kid, yet he chose not to. That's meekness. Sometimes it takes more courage NOT to fight than to fight. You have to choose your battles carefully in life. Someone once said a bulldog can whip a skunk, but it's just not worth the effort.

II. WILL I ALLOW JESUS TO TRANSPLANT HIS GENTLENESS INTO MY PERSONALITY?

I once heard someone say this about an obnoxious guy, "That person needs a personality transplant." Well, the truth is, we all need a personality transplant. We need Jesus to transplant His personality into ours. Today you can go into a hospital and get a kidney transplant, a liver transplant, a lung transplant, and even a heart transplant. The good news is you don't have to go into the hospital to get a personality transplant. When you place your faith in Jesus, He comes to dwell in your heart through the person of the Holy Spirit. And if you surrender to Him, He can demonstrate His gentleness in you. We know that Jesus was gentle because that's the way He described Himself. He said, "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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:29-30)

There aren't many times in the Gospels where Jesus describes His personality type, but in this verse He tells us, "I am gentle and humble in heart." When you allow Jesus to transplant His gentleness in you, there are three ways in which this gentleness will be seen.

A. Gentleness in action

The Bible teaches that God relates to us with the gentleness of a Good Shepherd who leads us. “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” (Isaiah 40:11)

Do you treat people with gentleness? Jesus put the needs of others before His own. That’s a mark of gentleness. Self-centered people aren’t gentle. The New Testament scholar Martyn Lloyd Jones gives us some insight into meekness: “The man who is meek is not sensitive about himself. Is it not one of the greatest curses in life as a result of the fall—this sensitivity about self? We spend the whole of our lives watching ourselves. But when a man becomes meek he has finished with all that; he no longer worries about himself and what other people say. The man who is truly meek never pities himself, he is never sorry for himself. He never talks to himself and says, ‘You are having a hard time, how unkind these people are not to understand you.’ He never thinks: ‘How wonderful I really am, if only other people gave me a chance.’ Self-pity! What hours and years we waste in this! But the man who has become meek has finished with all that.” So, a gentle person is so concerned about the needs of others that they never throw a pity party for themselves. The worst thing about a pity party is that you’re the only guest—and there are no presents!

Only people with real strength can be gentle. To illustrate this I need a young boy to come up on stage and help me for a minute. Let’s shake hands, and I want you to squeeze my hand as hard as you can. Go ahead try to hurt me. That’s pretty good, but is that all you’ve got? Okay, now I’m going to squeeze your hand as hard as I can. Ready? I didn’t think so! No, instead I’m going to demonstrate gentleness by keeping my strength under control.

As far as I can tell, there was only one time when Jesus got good and mad at His disciples. It’s in Mark 10 when there were some parents who wanted to bring their young children to Jesus but the disciples rebuked them. They probably said, “Don’t you know who this is? He’s the most famous traveling rabbi in Israel. He doesn’t have time for you and your kids. He’s too busy with important things.” When Jesus saw how his disciples rebuked the parents, the Bible says He was indignant—He was good and mad. He said, “Let the little children come to me. In fact, unless you adults receive the Kingdom like one of these little children, you’ll never enter it.” Then the Bible says He took the children in His arms and placed His hands on them and blessed them. That’s one of my favorite pictures of the gentleness of Jesus. In His hands resided the power to heal the sick, raise the dead and to create entire galaxies. They were the strongest hands any man ever had, yet He was gentle enough to caress little children.

Gentleness isn’t weakness; it’s strength under control. Gentleness means you don’t use strength to hurt those who are weaker. It’s true physically, and it’s true emotionally. If you’re ever in a confrontation where you could verbally or intellectually destroy the person who disagrees with you, gentleness prevents you from hurting them. Gentleness means you don’t get in someone’s face and yell at them. People are fragile; they need to be handled with care.

B. Gentleness in reaction

Life is 10% about what happens to you and 90% of how you react to what happens to you. Sometimes you have no control over what happens to you, but when you surrender to Jesus you can control how you react to what happens to you.

Before he met Jesus, the Apostle Paul was a hothead. He stood by approving the stoning of Stephen and he viciously attacked Christians. He had them arrested and thrown in prison. But when He met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he received a personality transplant.

One of the most dysfunctional churches Paul founded was at Corinth. They had all kinds of problems from sexual immorality to lawsuits against each other. Some of the members were critical of Paul saying he wasn't really an apostle. When Paul wrote to them address the problems he asked, “What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?” (1 Corinthians 4:21) He didn't choose the whip; he chose love. If you don't believe it just read the 13th Chapter of his letter to these messed-up believers.

Jesus reacted in gentleness when He was insulted. 1 Peter 2:23 says, “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats.” In Luke 9 Jesus and His disciples made plans to enter a Samaritan village and spend the night. But the Samaritans refused to show them hospitality. Suddenly the Holiday Inn said “No vacancy.” And the Samaritan restaurants said, “Sorry, no Jews allowed.” They openly insulted Jesus and His disciples. James and John were nicknamed “the Sons of Thunder;” which just means they were hotheads. They were so insulted they said to Jesus, “Let's call down fire from heaven and burn up these sorry Samaritans.” Now, could have Jesus called down fire? Absolutely! Did He? No; instead He rebuked James and John and said, “I didn't come to destroy people's lives, but to save them.” That's a gentle reaction to being insulted.

How do you react when people attack you? The *easiest* thing to do is to react with anger and hostility. But if you are full of Jesus, then you will react with gentleness. People are fragile—they need to be handled with care.

C. Gentleness in words

One of the greatest needs in our world today is for us to speak with gentleness to one another. There is so much hatred and animosity. Profanity has become the norm rather than the exception. A preacher responded to an ad for a used lawn mower. A little boy was showing it to him. The preacher asked, “Can I try to start it?” So he grabbed the cord and pulled it, but the engine didn't start. After a few hard pulls the boy said, “My daddy says you have to cuss at it to get it to start.” The preacher said, “I'm a preacher and I haven't cussed in 18 years.” The boy said, “Keep on pulling the rope, it'll come back to you.”

They say confession is good for the soul but bad for the reputation. I'll tell you something about myself that you might not suspect. You might think I'm a pretty calm guy, but I used to have a terrible temper. I was so competitive I would often lose my temper and say things I shouldn't have. It didn't take much to cause me to fly into a rage. But when I was in college, God convicted me that if I was going to be a pastor, I had to get rid of my anger. So, I wrote a verse of scripture on an index card and taped it to the mirror in my dorm room. And every time I

looked in the mirror I would quote this verse. God used that one verse to harness my anger. It was Proverbs 15:1 which says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1) Is that a verse you need to write down and keep before your eyes on a regular basis? God can use that simple truth to transform your personality like He did mine. I can honestly say I haven't lost my temper in at least...24 hours. No seriously, Jesus transplanted His gentle personality into my life.

I still quote a little poem I learned years ago: "I'm careful with the words I say; To keep them nice and sweet; 'Cause I never know from day to day; Which words I'll have to eat."

Sometimes it's not the words we say, but the tone of voice we use. A man attended a wedding and afterward he told a friend he didn't think the marriage would last. His friend asked him why he felt that way. He said, "Well, when the groom said, 'I do' the bride said, 'don't use that tone of voice with me!'"

HOW you say something is at least as important as WHAT you say. For instance, here are two people who are disagreeing. One person could say with gentleness, "Well, I'm so sorry." Or they could say the same words using a mocking tone of voice, "WELL! I'm soooo sorry."

Gentleness is strength under control. The Bible says the tongue is a small member of the body, but it has tremendous power. James wrote, "Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." (James 3:5-6)

Fire can be a good thing if it is kept under control. It can heat a cold house, and cook a delicious meal. But the recent wildfires in Colorado remind us that uncontrolled fire can cause widespread devastation. A forest fire never begins with a forest on fire; it starts with a spark. You can use your tongue to delight or to destroy. People are fragile—handle them with care.

CONCLUSION

One of many favorite sports heroes was Coach John Wooden, head basketball coach for the UCLA Bruins in the 1970s. His team set records that will never be broken. It's hard to win one national championship, and he won 7 in a row. He won 10 national championships in a 12-year period. And his team won 88 games in a row.

Some coaches, like Bobby Knight, are known for their fiery style. But John Wooden was one of the most gentle men who ever lived. Although he was intense during games, his strongest expletive was, "My goodness gracious." He had a reputation for molding players with fiery personalities like Bill Walton into team players and winners.

In his autobiography he wrote that as a young man he had a volatile temper. But his dad, Joshua, had a profound impact on his personality. He said his dad was one of the strongest men he'd ever known, able to lift weights men half his age couldn't budge. But he was gentle and even read poetry to his children at night. Coach Wooden recalls an incident in his childhood that shaped his

personality. “We had a team of mules named Jack and Kate. Kate would often get stubborn and lie down on me when I was plowing. I couldn’t get her up no matter how roughly I whipped her or yelled at her. Dad would see my predicament and walk across the field and lean down and rub Kate’s ear gently and say, ‘Come on, Kate.’ She would get up and start walking again. He never touched her in anger. It took me a long time to understand that even a stubborn mule responds to gentleness. My dad taught me that it takes a lot of strength on the inside to be gentle on the outside.”

The reason John Wooden was a gentle man is because He allowed Jesus to be gentle in him. “I have always tried to make it clear that basketball is not the ultimate. It is of small importance in comparison to the total life we live. There is only one kind of life that truly wins, and that is the one that places faith in the hands of the Savior.”

Will you allow the Holy Spirit to infuse your personality with the gentleness of Jesus? We don’t use “meek” as a verb in English, but have you allowed the Holy Spirit to “meek” you? Is your will still unbroken and your behavior unbridled? The Bible teaches that God treasures brokenness in a person. After King David had confessed sin in his life he wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

I want to issue a gentleness challenge. I declare these next seven days as Meek Week. For the next seven days, I challenge you to allow the gentleness of Jesus to be displayed in your life. In your family, with your friends, at work; ask Jesus to transplant His gentle personality into you.

Remember, people are fragile—they need to be handled with care!

OUTLINE

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Pastor David Dykes