

## #152 “How Is Your Gentle Side?”

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Gentleness is not the most compelling of the fruit of the Spirit, especially for the men. It sounds wimpy, cowardly, and just too “feminine.” We know that a gentle spirit in women is precious to God (1 Peter 3:4), but the fact of the matter is that gentleness is also a godly trait for men (James 3:13, Titus 3:2). Indeed, we are not walking fully in the Spirit as followers of Christ if we are not gentle. Thus, it is important that we know what gentleness is and how to manifest it in our lives.

The best way to understand gentleness is to look at our God, Who is gentle. Christ had no problem being known as gentle. Matthew 21:5 says, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” His gentleness did not make Him a wimp Who would stand for nothing. His tenderness did not make Him give up His power or authority. His gentleness showed that God had drawn near to mankind so that He would bear the burden of our sin. It showed that He was seeking peace, reconciliation, and restoration. He came not harshly with words of condemnation (except to the proud) but rather with words of salvation. His arms were open, tender, and receptive to children, to foreigners, and to sinners; none was unworthy of His gentle embrace. The God Who is all-powerful is also a God of gentleness. We can thus have absolute confidence that His gentle embrace is soundly unbreakable and totally secure and safe.

When God revealed Himself to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11-13, He was not in the earthquake or the fire, symbols of judgment and power. Rather, His manifestation to Elijah was that of a gentle blowing wind. Elijah knew God’s power and judgment, having just seen God devour a sacrifice with fire from heaven and rid the land of the priests of Baal. But at this point, Elijah was worn down and despairing of life itself. God didn’t come to him harshly but gently. God was still powerful and on the throne, as the earthquake and fire indicated, but He was also there to meet Elijah in his time of need. God showed Elijah His gentle side, speaking kindly to him and providing miraculously for him. He didn’t baby him, for He told him, in effect, to stop whining and get back to work. But He wasn’t harsh about it. He didn’t get angry with Elijah, He didn’t pour out His wrath upon him for his selfishness, and He didn’t penalize him or punish him. He came near to Elijah, spoke tenderly to him, had a meaningful and direct conversation with him, and then exhorted him to get back to business. God was with Elijah in showing forth His power and judgment, and when Elijah needed some gentle encouragement, God was there to minister gentleness to Him.

There will be times in life when people let us down. There will be times when our children will disobey and break our hearts. There will be times when we will hurt those whom we love, maybe saying or doing something in a moment of weakness, stress, or exasperation. None of these things are right, good, or free of sin. They are wrong, they need to be confronted, and they need to be repented of. Yet gentleness impacts how conflicts and confrontations are handled. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A gentle answer turns

away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” In other words, when somebody insults us, challenges us, or confronts us, we are to respond without raging back at them. Our answer is to be tender, unprovoked, and kind. We are to forgive those who trespass against us... period. We are to pray for those who persecute us and love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). If we sinned and provoked others to anger or said something we shouldn't have, their retaliation would only stir up more anger. It is kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Such kindness is gentle and does not get provoked to give a harsh response. What we need in times of relational difficulties are gentle words of confrontation, rebuke, exhortation, or encouragement that can lead us to get back on track.

There will be times (or should be) when we are asked about the hope that we have in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). At those times, we are told to give a defense for what we believe, yet gently and reverently. The point is that we can say all of the right things and give a godly explanation for faith, but if we don't do it in a way that shows others that we care about them and love as our Lord loves, we will fail to be and do what God wants us to be and do. We are not to treat others as inferior for not knowing Christ, as outcasts because they are not yet saved, or as those who are intruding on our schedule. Yet let us remember that gentleness doesn't gloss over sin and the truth for the sake of being "friendly." It merely seasons the truth with salt, making it palatable and desirable, so that those whom we confront or exhort experience the grace of God (Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 4:6).

There will be times when a brother or sister is caught in sin, and we are to restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1). It may be tempting to lash out at that person and think or say, "How could you be so stupid or selfish?" It could be tempting to shun him or her, to be maligning, to give a guilt trip, or to make the person earn our acceptance back. These are not God's ways. We must remember that we are just as capable of sinning as others are. Thus we should go to those who have fallen into sin not as those who bring condemnation but as those who seek restoration and reconciliation, hoping that they will ask for the forgiveness that we are prepared to offer.

May God's tender nature be seen so vividly in and through us such that those who are in sin are able to see their sinfulness against the backdrop of the grace and gentleness of God. May we be those who are not easily provoked, who make others feel safe, and who are always willing to forgive. How is your gentle side?