

"Be Gentle"

By Allan Pole



Theme: Handle your relationships with care.

Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9

Here's a thought: Mother Teresa exhorted, "Be kind to each other: it is better to commit faults with gentleness than to work miracles with unkindness."

There are two chairs and a table here at the front. Seated in one chair is a very strong man. Seated across from him is a fine young boy about six years of age.

Now, if these two lock grips for an arm-wrestling match, it is obvious who has the greater strength. But, if the man, out of his love for children, decides to yield and let our young friend "win," the man demonstrates meekness. He did not have to give in, but he did so out of a good heart.

If, on the other hand, the boy loses the match to this mighty man, is the boy demonstrating meekness? No, it is because of relative weakness that the boy loses.

Meekness is possible only in a position of strength.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9 the Apostle Paul describes such inner strength:

7 As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. NIV

God's gentleness in you:

Cares



In 1 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul explains, “We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.”

Gentleness shows personal care and concern in meeting the needs of others.

I am repeatedly amazed at the patience and tenderness that a mother demonstrates to her little children.

As late as 1920 the death rate among infants in some hospitals who cared for abandoned babies approached 100%. The problem was that they needed some tender loving care. Without it, we die! When these babies were picked up and loved, they lived.

At Purdue University, a study was conducted with librarians. Half were asked to touch those who came in to check out or return books or ask for information. The other half were to conduct business as usual, with no touching. The study concluded that those who were touched had higher regard for the librarians and the books in the library, and followed the rules more willingly.

This study makes two good points:

1. God has made you to need and appreciate tender touch.
2. Your appropriate, gentle touch can impact others' behaviour.

A man was a member of a church where they were having a lot of difficulty. He became so nervous that he couldn't speak. He went to the doctor and the doctor gave him some tranquilizers. Two days later he went back to the doctor and asked, "Doctor, what did you give me?"

The doctor replied, "I gave you some tranquilizers."

"Well, I don't want any more of them."

The doctor asked, "Why not?"

The man explained, "They made me act friendly with people I don't like in our church."

We like to think that blessed are the strong, the shrewd, those who stand up for their rights, those who refuse to be taken advantage of, those who react to insults, those who strike it rich and make it a success.

The Biblical concept of meekness, however, is different. The word "meekness" or "gentleness" is also used to describe an animal which has been trained by its master. Wild and unruly animals are not helpful but when trained they become meek, that is, teachable and quiet. Thus, meekness or gentleness is strength under the control of God. Gentleness is true power.

One of the greatest leaders ever lived 1500 years before Christ. Look how he responded to criticism in Numbers 12:1-5:

1 Miriam and Aaron [his sister and brother] began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. 3 (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) 4 At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. 5 Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. NIV

When it comes to influencing others, English poet and theologian Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) pointed out, "Advice is like snow; the softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon and the deeper it sinks into the mind."

I sometimes had to say to my daughter and son when they were little, "Be gentle now," when they were petting a kitten. I did not have to say that so much when they were petting a horse. Gentleness treats the vulnerability of others with delicate care.

Barbara Johnson challenged, "If you think meekness is weakness, try being meek for a week."

Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is power and strength harnessed and controlled. Gentleness appears to be weak but is actually quite powerful and it makes a person attractive to others. Gentleness is expressed through tender care for another.

Caring and demanding your own rights are incompatible. In proportion to how often you demand to be recognized and served, your ability to care for others is stifled.

How much have you thought of the needs of others this past week? Have you reached out and touched someone today with a kind word, gentle touch or a good deed?

God's gentleness in you:
Cares

Bonds



In 1 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul reveals:

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. NIV

Sydney Smith observed, "Life is to be fortified by many friendships. To love, and to be loved, is the greatest happiness of existence."

"Gentle" is the opposite of "harsh" or "violent".



Have you ever tried to hug a porcupine? He has a very effective way to get his point across. The quills keep others at a distance. Those quills are there for a good reason: self-defence. It must, however, be a lonely life to be a porcupine. Did you know that a group of porcupines is called a "prickle"? I have *never* seen a prickle of porcupines.

There are four ways in which bonding with other followers of Jesus is important to our spiritual and psychological health:

1. We need help to maintain our values in a culture that is increasingly opposed to the God of the Holy Bible.
2. We need a listening ear or a loving word of advice.
3. We need role models.
4. You and I need to bear each other's burdens, to offer help and support when needed.

Have you been accumulating quills as you go through life? Have you vowed

never to trust people again?

I can sense a profound change in the Apostle Peter from the time he first began to follow Jesus to when he penned 1 Peter 1:22:

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. NIV

People identify with your weaknesses more than your strengths. Mother Teresa exhorted, "Be kind to each other: it is better to commit faults with gentleness than to work miracles with unkindness."

How do you come across to people? Are you distant? Do you admit your shortcomings or do you try to cover them up?

God's gentleness in you:

Cares

Bonds

Gives



In 1 Thessalonians 2:9 Paul recalls:

Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. NIV

Gentleness gives without expecting anything in return. It is extended as unto the Lord, not to place someone in debt to you.

Looking for an inexpensive gift for a friend, a penny pincher went into a gift shop but found everything too expensive. He priced a glass vase that had been broken and found that he could buy it for almost nothing. He asked the store to send it, thinking his friend would assume it had been broken in the mail.

After a while he received a note from his friend that read: "Thank you for the vase. It was so thoughtful of you to wrap each piece separately."

James 3:13 reminds you that giving is a sign of wisdom:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good

life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. NIV

As you give to people, remember:

1. Some will reject your help; others will expect it and respect it.
2. Some may show anger or resentment and yet accept your help.
3. Step into the shoes of the one you are giving to and feel what they are feeling.
4. Others' problems are not your problems - do what you can, but rarely your job is to rescue others.
5. You need to set limits. Help others carry their burdens without negating a person's responsibility to carry his or her own load.
6. Be careful not to build up expectations that the person will change in specific ways (such as becoming a follower of Christ). You must respect their right to make their own decisions. Jesus placed no expectations on those He healed and helped. He gave them choices.
7. Discern whether your helping interferes with God's will for this person's life. Jesus felt compassion for the sick, but His actions were always guided by His Father's will. Sometimes you can help people more by not helping them at all. Even Jesus did not heal every sick person or answer every call for help.

When was the last time you gave to an individual or organization expecting to receive a thank you, recognition, a tax receipt or some benefit in return?

Gentleness is cultivated as you see the needs of others - even in the meanest, grumpiest people. Gentleness enables you to look past the gruffness and anger to a soul that is hurting and needy.

When General Robert E. Lee, Commander of the defeated Confederate Army of the south, began his retreat from Gettysburg at the conclusion of the American Civil War, a wounded Union soldier from the north raised his fist and shouted in taunt against the passing Southern commander. The defeated General paused and dismounted his horse.

Believing the General was about to kill him, the determined blue-clad soldier continued to hold out his fist. General Lee gently took the outreached fist in his own hand and said, "My son, I hope you will soon be well."

What would *you* have done? Gentleness is listed in Galatians 5 as a fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit can work in you so that you consistently demonstrate His gentleness. Will you let Him?

God's gentleness in you:

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