



fruit

but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **gentleness** and self-control





Gentleness

"Our identity rests
in God's relentless
tenderness for us
revealed in Jesus
Christ."

Brennan Manning



Power

What does it mean to be powerful?

When our own power is in question, when we're insulted or taken advantage of, responding with harshness and anger is reflexive. Repaying insult with insults and condescension with contempt. It comes more naturally than most anything else, like a porcupine raising its quills in self-defense.

God, the creator of all power, often expresses his strength through overwhelming grace rather than wrath.

Responding to all of the world's hard edges with gentleness can seem like leaving yourself vulnerable for an inevitable attack. It's 'flight' when your pride is screaming for 'fight.' But looking weak in the eyes of the world can mean looking strong in the eyes of God.

If we write off gentleness as weakness, submission or even condescension, we miss the point. When we're told that the Christian life will be marked by gentleness, it is in opposition to our natural tendencies— competition, anger, and jealousy.

It isn't just showing tenderness to a hurting friend or being generous to a cause that tugs at your heartstrings. Choosing gentleness is battling and overcoming all of the internal voices crying out for vindication or spitefulness. It is not maintaining a naiveté about the ways of the world, but understanding them and refusing to indulge in them. Real gentleness is only possible with great power.

*"Therefore be as shrewd
as snakes and as innocent
as doves."*

MATTHEW 10:6

- Does our faith ever require us to 'dumb ourselves down?'
- How is it possible to be shrewd and innocent at the same time?
- Do you tend to sacrifice innocence, or shrewdness?
- What kind of person comes to mind when you think of gentleness?
- What is an example of quiet strength you've seen in your life?

"God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than He is of any other slacker."

C.S. Lewis

Humility



Pride is very sensitive and insecure; it is threatened by pretty much everything. When you're ruled by pride, showing gentleness leaves you vulnerable for attack. Cowardice or pettiness traps you from being extravagantly gracious and compassionate. If you are too afraid or aware of looking foolish, being taken less seriously, appearing weak, then you will not be set free into a life marked by gentleness.

Freedom is found in a firm understanding of your identity. Jesus was never insecure when he acted compassionately. He was not afraid of looking weak because he knew who he was, and was confident of the power living inside him. When you know you are a loved and empowered child of God, there is no attack on your pride that could win. Gentleness is humility and complete confidence.

We aren't only called to be gentle, we are also called to accept it. God treats us tenderly when we don't deserve it, when we never could. At times, this is a relief. It can be a lifeline thrown out to save

us from drowning. But other times, it is a very bitter pill to swallow.

We need to be treated gently, but so often feels shameful. It comes with an implication that we can't handle honesty or reality. We don't want to think of ourselves as something that needs to be cared for. Who wants to feel needy and helpless? Our culture awards independence and capability; simply acknowledging the need for help and tenderness can be equated to inadequacy.

Some of the humility that goes hand-in-hand with gentleness is the recognition that each one of us needs it as much as anyone else. It is not a sign of weakness. It is a powerful gift, not wholly unlike grace, of undeserved kindness. And the Holy Spirit is showing it over and over and over.

*A soft answer turns away
wrath, but a harsh word
stirs up anger.*

PROVERBS 15:1

- How do you generally react to conflict?
- What types of things bruise your pride?
- How do you respond when your pride is hurt?
- Is ever a time when avoiding conflict is actually ungentle?
- Where in your life do you need to be treated gently?

"As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on thing and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you."

C.S. Lewis



Radical

Empathy is painful. It's an intentional acceptance of someone else's suffering. We are to be tenderhearted toward everyone, to take on their struggles as if they were our own whether that means listening without judgment or helping without questioning. It can be incredibly simple. But it can also be exhausting.

Temptation of anger or selfishness or pride seem pretty straightforward, but we can underestimate the strength of the temptation of self-preservation. When our softened hearts are hurt, we want to do what it takes to protect them. Appropriate boundaries and attention to rest are healthy expressions of this. But when we become unwilling to experience someone's pain with them, we make it impossible for ourselves to live a life marked by gentleness.

If our hearts aren't softened, then they're hardened. Like the Pharaoh who refused to let the Israelites go free, we might prefer to see things economically, logically, and selfishly rather than what God intends.

Even when 'what God intends' seems to make no sense, or seems to be damaging to ourselves.

Jesus doesn't really give us an out when it comes to loving others. Instead of relieving a man of the duty to forgive his brother, he tells him to forgive more abundantly. Maybe the brother will continue to behave badly. But does that mean he can't receive the gentle grace of God?

This kind of radical gentleness is not indulgence, but love. We aren't acting blindly, although it might seem so from the outside. Unending compassion and willingness to help are reflections of the great love God has for all of us.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

EZEKIEL 36:26

- Are we ever called to help to the point of personal sacrifice?
- What does it look like to have a softened heart?
- When has someone lead you through a difficult time?
- Who do you know who might need your compassion?
- How can you put it into action today?

*"I believe He wants us
to love others so much
that we go to extremes
to help them."*

Francis Chan



Strength

One of the most famous displays of God's power happens in the chapter right before this passage. In front of hundreds of prophets of a false god, God answers Elijah's prayer and burns his offering with fire from heaven—fire so strong it scorched the ground and dried standing water.

So many stories in Scripture show God's power. Fire falls down from the heavens, people are raised from the dead, and impossible things become possible. Somehow at the same time, he is found in a whisper and not an earthquake. He walks with us in the garden in the cool of the afternoon. He catches our tears and sets our feet on solid ground. What kind of strength is required for such tenderness?

It's nice to believe that God is so gentle and provides so much comfort. But isn't there a question lurking in the background? God shows his gentleness when he rescues us from our own despair, but was it gentle of him to allow the darkness in the first place? It can

be hard to feel grateful for his compassion when it is in response to something might have prevented. There are answers to that question, some more satisfying than others. Whatever situation you may find yourself in, it doesn't change the character of God. Despite every setback and difficulty, whether it's of your own making or completely outside of your control, God is loving and gentle toward you.

He sees our worst, and he still loves us. He makes us better when he could leave us to our own devices. He absorbs all of our tantrums, endures our abuse, gives us the freedom to be angry and indignant yet never moves away. That is easier to know than it is to believe. But being brave in our faith means a willingness to wrestle with it.

*And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.
And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in
his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance
of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to
him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

- How do you practice listening to God?
- Do you feel like God tends to speak to you in the loud events, or the quiet?
- How does his quietness show his power?
- Jesus was prophesied to come to this world gently and lovingly, never brushing aside the hurt or disregarding people as insignificant. Does this line up with your understanding of God's character?
- Where have you seen this kind of tenderness in your own life?

"Live in the wisdom of accepted tenderness. Tenderness awakens within the security of knowing we are thoroughly and sincerely liked by someone... Scripture suggests that the essence of the divine nature is compassion and that the heart of God is defined by tenderness."

Brennan Manning

Unsettled Collective exists to create bold, and at times subversive, discipleship content that will encourage people in faith while also provoking them into action. We create artistic devotional material for individuals, groups, and teams that spark discussion and challenge our perception of what Christianity is, what a church should look like, and who is welcome at the table.

Learn more at unsettledcollective.com

