

Gentleness:

The Strength of Being Tender

By Phyllis J. LePeau

Study 1: Gentleness Is Not Weakness

WARMING UP

1. Why do you think people sometimes assume that a gentle person is also a weak person?

DIGGING IN

2. Read Matthew 21:1–17. What impact do you think the events in verses 1–11 had on the disciples? On the crowd?

3. According to verse 5, the prophet Zechariah describes Jesus as gentle (Zechariah 9:9). How is his gentleness demonstrated in the way he approaches Jerusalem (vv. 5–11)?

4. There is a sudden change of tone as Jesus enters the temple. What motivates Jesus' actions in verses 12–13?

5. How do Christ's actions in the temple contrast with the popular image of "gentle Jesus, meek and mild"?

6. In what kinds of situations is a firm, tough love more appropriate than a gentle response?

7. How is Christ's gentleness again demonstrated in his response to the blind, the lame, and the children (vv. 14–15)?

8. The chief priests and the teachers of the law are "indignant" when they see the wonderful things Jesus does and when they hear the shouts of the children (vv. 15–16). Why are the religious leaders threatened by these things?

9. How would you evaluate Christ's response to their challenge (vv. 16–17)? Is he confrontational? Gentle? Both?

10. What do you learn about gentleness as you observe Jesus throughout this passage?

11. In what ways do you struggle to achieve a gentleness that is not weak and a strength that is not harsh?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God to develop the fruit of gentleness within you as you seek to follow the example of Jesus.

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Study 2: Being Gentle With the Weak

WARMING UP

1. What common types of weakness do people experience?

DIGGING IN

2. Read Matthew 12:15–21. As you read this passage, what are your initial impressions about Jesus?

3. What do you think it means that “he will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets” (v. 19)?

4. What is it like for you to be around someone who seeks controversy or who proclaims truth in an assertive and abrasive manner?

5. What do a “bruised reed” and a “smoldering wick” represent (v. 20)?

6. How does Jesus respond to each?

7. When have you felt like a reed that was bruised or a wick that was about to go out?

What were helpful and unhelpful ways that people responded to you?

8. How do you generally respond to those who are physically, emotionally, or spiritually weak?

How would you like to respond?

9. Proclaiming and promoting justice is an important part of Jesus’ ministry (vv. 18, 20). How does gentleness, especially to the weak, contribute to that mission?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Think about a relationship in which you are struggling to be gentle. Ask God’s Spirit to develop the fruit of gentleness in you as you grow in that relationship.

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Study 3: Being Gentle With Our Words

WARMING UP

1. In what situations do gentle words mean the most to you?

DIGGING IN

2. Read Proverbs 15:1, 4. Verse 1 states that a gentle answer turns away wrath. When have you experienced this?

3. When have you seen anger stirred up by harsh words?

4. According to verse 4, what contrasting effects can a tongue have?

5. What do you think it means to crush someone's spirit with a perverse tongue (v. 4)?

6. It is a sobering fact that our tongues can crush spirits. Can you think of examples when you or someone else crushed another's spirit with words? Explain.

7. How would you describe a tree of life (v. 4)? What is it like? What does it do?

8. When has God used your tongue for healing in another's life, or when has someone else's tongue brought you healing?

9. What steps do you need to take for your tongue to speak words of life more frequently?

10. Read Proverbs 25:15. What do patience and a gentle tongue have in common?

11. What do you think it means that a gentle tongue can break a bone?

12. How do the proverbs in this study challenge and encourage you about your words?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Confess to the Lord Jesus that sometimes you are not even aware of the effect your words have on others. Ask him to make you sensitive to how you can encourage and heal others with words and to convict you about hurtful and destructive words before you speak them.

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Study 4: Being Gentle In Our Ministry

WARMING UP

1. What gentle moments with your mom and dad do you remember from your childhood?

DIGGING IN

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12. What had Paul's visit to Thessalonica been like according to verses 1–2?

3. How would you describe Paul's motives in ministering to the Thessalonians (vv. 3–6)?

4. What usually motivates you to share the gospel and nurture other Christians?

5. In what ways was Paul like a mother to the Thessalonians (vv. 7–9)?

6. What do you think it meant that he shared not only the gospel with them but his life as well?

7. In what ways was Paul also like a father to the Thessalonians (vv. 10–12)?

8. When have other Christians treated you with motherly gentleness or fatherly care?

How did you respond to their love and concern?

9. What was the ultimate goal of Paul's ministry (v. 12)?

10. How can you express gentleness in your ministry as you aim for that goal?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Thank God for specific people who have encouraged you to live a life worthy of God by gently sharing their lives and the gospel. Ask God to help you to gently share your life and the gospel with others.

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Study 5: The Gentleness of Wisdom

WARMING UP

1. What do you think it means to be wise?

DIGGING IN

2. Read James 3:13–18. According to verse 13, how are wisdom and understanding demonstrated?

3. What do you think it means to live a “good life”? To be humble?

4. How is humility an important element of being wise?

5. What are some characteristics of “earthly” wisdom (vv. 14–15)?

6. What are the results of this kind of wisdom (v. 16)?

7. What examples of this “earthly wisdom” and its results have you seen in our culture? In your life?

8. How is the fruit of gentleness evident in the wisdom that comes from heaven (v. 17)?

9. In what ways have you seen this kind of wisdom in the lives of some of the people you know?

10. What is a “harvest of righteousness”?

11. What aspects of heavenly wisdom do you most need in your life?

12. What can you do to allow this gentle heavenly wisdom to grow more fully in you?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Praise God for heavenly wisdom — wisdom that by his power can be lived out practically in your life. Ask him to give you this wisdom. Believe that he will do it.

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Study 6: Gentleness and Power

WARMING UP

1. What does the world tend to look for in a powerful person?

DIGGING IN

2. Read 2 Corinthians 10:1–11. How did Paul fail to measure up to the Corinthians' image of a powerful person?

3. Why do you think he appeals to them "by the humility and gentleness of Christ" (v. 1)?

4. What do you think Paul means when he says "we do not wage war as the world does" (v. 3)?

5. What evidence of spiritual warfare do you see in and around you?

6. What spiritual weapons can we use to demolish the arguments and pretensions against God?

7. What does it mean to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (v. 5)?

8. How does Paul demonstrate that gentleness is not timidity or weakness (vv. 2, 4–6, 11)?

9. How might you be inclined to defend yourself to someone who said you were "timid" and "unimpressive"?

10. Paul freely admits that his power comes not from himself but from Christ (vv. 4–5, 8). How does this give hope to those who are gentle not only in action but in temperament?

11. In review, what have you learned about the fruit of gentleness in these studies?

PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God to make the fruit of gentleness increasingly a part of who you are in Christ.