

This morning lets look at the second to last VIRTUE, the fruit of the Spirit - **GENTLENESS!**

A wife went with her friend to the police station to report that her husband was missing! When the policeman asked for a description, she said, "He's 6 foot 2, has deep blue eyes, dark wavy hair, athletic build, well-groomed and sharply dressed, weighs 185 pounds He's soft-spoken, well-mannered, **gentle** and loves the children."

The friend spoke up and said, "But your husband is fat, 5 foot 3, rude, smokes cigars, bald, has a big mouth, never bathes, dresses sloppy, his teeth are rotten and he is terribly mean to your children."

The wife replied, "Yes, but who wants that one back?"

After spending 3-1/2 hours enduring long lines, rude clerks and insane regulations at the Department of Motor Vehicles, Glenn Vaughan stopped at a toy store to pick up a gift for his son. "I brought my selection - a baseball bat - to the cash register," he said. "Cash or charge?" the clerk asked. "Cash," He snapped. Then apologizing for his rudeness, he explained, "I've spent the entire afternoon at the motor vehicle bureau." The woman sweetly replied, "shall I gift-wrap the bat...or are you going back there?" I can second that emotion!

Those stories illustrate that what Leslie Charles, psychologist, says is more than likely accurate. In that the American Psyche is headed for a pressure cooker explosion because she sees a society that is getting angrier and angrier and more self-centered every day. She says many have bought into the *belief* of the "**The Cranky Code**" of conduct:

1. I am entitled to what I want when I want it.
2. My time is important and I should not have to be inconvenienced by others.
3. I have the right to be impatient or rude when other people are behaving stupidly.
4. I am entitled to special privileges because I am who I am.

5. I'm a taxpayer; I own part of this road & I have the right to drive as fast as I want.
6. I not only have the right to pursue happiness, I deserve to be happy and I'll do whatever it takes to achieve it.
7. I'm entitled to cheat a little bit in order to get ahead. If I don't take advantage someone else will, and then they'll be a step ahead of me.
8. I work extra hard but don't get paid for it so I'm justified in helping myself to a few "souvenirs" from my office to offset what I am rightly owed.
9. I'm too busy to mince around with false politeness and should be able to tell people exactly what I think without having to worry about their feelings.
10. I must be more in the know than everyone else so I can stay one up on them; otherwise they may take advantage of me.
11. I deserve the newest, the biggest, the best, and the most. It's my right.
12. I'm going to die one day so I may as well get as much as I can right now.
13. So what if I'm rude-I never have to see this person again, so what difference does it make?
14. My opinions and views are more valid than anyone else's.
15. My emergencies take precedence over anyone else's emergency.
16. The world is unfair and opportunities are limited, so I may as well get all I can while I can, regardless of who or what stands in my way.

She adds, "Though clearly non-Christian in origin, these belief statements can honestly reflect the flesh patterns of believers even-though we may be very reluctant to admit it" (178, 179 Getting, Anger Under Control) **But what does the Bible say:**

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **Philippians 4:5**
(page 452)

In a nationwide study conducted by the Gallup organization on the **thirty** key ideas in this book, *gentleness* came in **dead last**. The quality of gentleness appears to be a rare and evasive one in our culture — no matter whether

someone is a Christian or a non-Christian. Both groups admitted this characteristic was severely lacking, making it the number one nemesis inside their own heart.

“**Are you known as someone who raises their voice?**” is the question that tanked them. Of all thirty statements, this one gave the most people the biggest problem. While Christians scored slightly higher in exhibiting gentleness than non-Christians, both readily admitted their intense struggle to express this quality.

KEY QUESTION: How do I demonstrate **thoughtfulness & consideration toward others?**

What is it about this particular virtue that gives us **fits**? As a society, and even in the church, why are we so **uptight**? *Tense*? Stressed out? Why is **gentleness** such a stranger to so many? A greater question to ask is this: *If Christ is present in our lives, why aren't Christians markedly **gentler** than those who **do not** follow the gentle Healer?*

As we open the Bible, we find insight into how we can become more like Jesus for the sake of those God has placed in our lives.

KEY IDEA: I am thoughtful, considerate, and **calm in my dealings with others.**

When Paul used the word *gentleness* in our key verse in **Philippians 4:5**, he selected the Greek word ***epieikeia***, which connotes a thoughtful, considerate, and decent outlook. Rather than hotly demanding their rights, whatever the cost to others, those with this trait **seek** peace in a **calm** way.

When Paul picked the word *gentleness* to depict an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, he selected the Greek word ***prautes***. In Paul's day, this word was linked to the *medical* world and carried the idea of a “*mild medication.*” We might say a gentle person is someone who is “***easy on your stomach.***” This is a perfect word picture, isn't it? Think of a *churning* stomach, that almost *nauseating* feeling you get when you know you're going to encounter a **prideful person** who, while they may be right much of the time, dispenses doses of

medicine that are too rough to take. (difference between Castor oil & Pepto Bismal.)

This word was also used in reference to tamed animals. Think about a horse. These animals weigh an average of a thousand pounds and have the potential to seriously injure or even kill human beings. Yet we can walk up to the vast majority of horses, pet them, ride them, and deem them as gentle. Is this a reflection of their power and strength? No. **It is an indication of their nature** — what they are like **after** being trained. Gentleness for a horse is a choice to allow his power and strength to be controlled. *A gentle person is not a weak person, but rather is a strong, secure, mature person who uses their strength to face real giants and challenges in their life but chooses not to run roughshod over others.*

Together these two Greek words, *epieikeia* and *prautes*, reflect the opposite of an angry harshness that grows out of personal pride and a dominating selfishness. **Christ wants us to become gentle for the sake of others.**

KEY APPLICATION: What difference does this make **in the way I live?**

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon reminds us of the importance of exhibiting gentleness in the way we treat others:

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

Prov. 15:1

- **We are thoughtful.** We take the time to assess a situation and get the whole story. We don't move through life like a bull in a china shop, but we care about people along the way. We find ourselves often asking the question, "How are you doing?" We want to be known for doing little things behind the scenes to encourage people.
- **We are considerate.** When we're in a position to make a decision, we consider the impact on others. We seek their input before we pull the trigger. We do our best to put ourselves in the other person's shoes. We study the people God has put in our lives to discover what energizes them, what sets them off, and what buttons not to push. Key question in marriage that reflects

gentleness and consideration is: “**What’s best for us?**” Maybe we should expand the use of that ?? beyond the borders of family life.

- **We are calm.** While we will have moments when passion and aggression are right and necessary, there is great strength in our convictions when we hold to them in quiet confidence. A **calm parent is more effective than a raging lunatic!** It unnerves children when we look them in the eye & speak calmly. When approached by a rough, heated individual, we resist the temptation to meet fire with fire & walk away if necessary to defuse the situation. Because it’s easy to become harsh, impatient, and arrogant when we’re too busy and stressed, we seek to live lives where we take time to breathe, smell the roses, and pace ourselves.

Think about this **self-evaluation question** regarding the virtue of **gentleness**: *If you had plans with someone for Sunday evening, would they be dreading the time with you or excited about the visit. Would they be expecting you to be calm or abrasive? Would they anticipate you to be thoughtful and attentive or self-focused and distracted? Would they leave the time with you feeling encouraged or discouraged? Worn-out or refreshed?*

The problem with this scenario, though, is that **self-evaluation** is deceptive.

We cannot fully see & understand our lack of gentleness.

What **we** do is normative; **we** are the benchmark.

Our lack of gentleness doesn’t bother us too much.

Our outburst is justified in **our** minds because of the rudeness & stupidity of insensitive & ignorant people. Someone has to fix the mess they are making.

Our lack of gentleness is not a problem but a solution. **Or at least this is how we tend to see it.**

If we want to know the true measure of **our** gentleness, we have to ask others. **Gentleness** is a fruit; it is external, & everyone will be eating our fruit when they spend time with us. If it is **sour**, they will know; if it is **sweet**, they will know. The problem is that if we truly lack in the virtue of gentleness, these folks will be afraid to tell us the truth, lest we attack them. We have to find someone who is secure enough in Christ to tell us the truth in love.

Randy Frazee shares the following personal story: “Years ago, we owned a wonderful little home on a cozy street lined with pecan trees in suburban Texas. I was trying my best to be a good homeowner on a very small budget. In Texas, it’s almost a necessity to have an in-ground sprinkler system, which we did not have. I couldn’t afford to hire a company to install one, so a member of my staff, who had installed such a system (or at least led me to believe he had), came over to help me get the job done.

As you might suspect, we didn’t do it correctly. Little did I know the implications of this mistake. At five o’clock each morning, the sprinklers would go off in the backyard and shoot streams of water over my fence onto my neighbor’s wood-shingled roof. Not a good thing over time. To make matters worse, my neighbor was a retired Englishman who did everything with meticulous excellence — made possible with unlimited time, quite a lot of money, and a perfectionistic personality.

One sunny afternoon, I was out working out in the yard, and my neighbor called out to me. I started making neighborly chitchat with him. He quickly cut me off and proceeded to tell me about the water that was being sprayed onto his roof. If he had just stopped there! But he didn’t. He laid into me big-time. Let’s just say there were expletives and threats of lawsuits. I was devastated. I was sick to my stomach. His brand of medication didn’t settle well with me. I apologized and fixed the problem, but our relationship was injured. I wanted to confront him, but, frankly, he scared me.

About a month later, he knocked on our door. I was at work, but Rozanne, my wife, answered the door. Some branches from one of the trees on my property were hanging over his roof. He asked Rozanne if I would cut it down — and he was willing to help pay for it. Rozanne, a secure person who wasn’t afraid of my neighbor (at least not yet), proceeded to speak a few words of calm truth into his life that I doubt he’d heard much before.

She said, “You know, I’m sure Randy would be more than happy to take this tree down, but you really hurt his feelings a few weeks ago.” She proceeded to recap the brutal conversation from my perspective. When she finished, he expressed that he hadn’t realized that his lack of gentleness toward me had crushed me the way it did. Something got through to him, because he said to my wife, “You know, I am just a grumpy old man. You tell him to come see me when he gets home.”

In fear and trepidation I did. My neighbor apologized to me. I cut down the tree at my expense, and we became the best of friends.

My neighbor’s lack of gentleness would have continued as a pattern had it not been for the loving, constructive confrontation of my wife. Through the process, I also learned how to be a better neighbor. Before I start doing home projects, I check with my neighbors to make sure I’m not injuring their investment and stirring up their anger.

What lesson did I learn? That I don’t like living around people who give me an upset stomach. When I swallow the medicine they give out, it might be good for me, but it’s just too harsh on my system. As a Christ follower, I certainly don’t want to be a “**pill**” to the people God put in my life to love. Fortunately, I have a loving, gentle wife who will tell me the truth in love. As I’ve asked for feedback and learned more about how to be gentle, little by little I am becoming more like Christ and people are not afraid to come to me.”