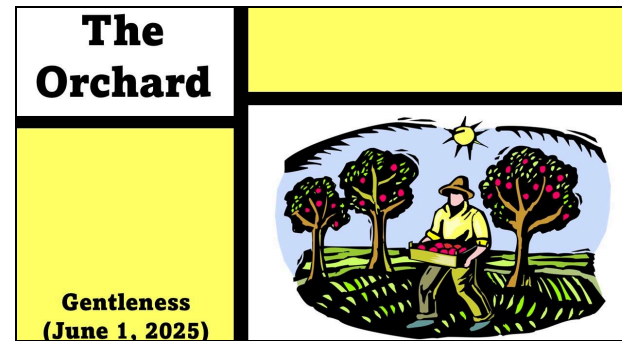


The Orchard (Week 5) - Gentleness  
**Yesterday's Sermon Summary**

1. In his famous devotional "My Utmost for His Highest," the English pastor Oswald Chambers writes, "The true expression of Christian is not in good-doing but in God-likeness." That's really what this series, and its key passage [Galatians 5.22-23](#), is all about - how God's Spirit is at work in each and every life trying not just to make us good, but trying to make act, think, and respond like God does (as if there is a way to be good without being like good anyway...food for thought).



2. This week we turn our attention the Spirit-induced fruit of gentleness. In both testaments, the term has the same two broad connotations. First, it means to move in and through your world tenderly and considerately. Like how you catch a raw egg, like how you hold a fragile soap bubble in your hand, like how a cat can cross a cluttered table without knocking anything over, like how an expert baker softly kneads biscuit dough, or like how a museum curator handles an ancient manuscript.
3. But, second, gentleness is a strong or powerful word, not timid, weak, or passive. To be gentle is NOT to grit your teeth and bear it, nor is to absorb punishment on end. No, to be gentle is self-restraint, measured strength and power. As one author puts it, gentleness is found in the pauses - the pause between stimuli and reaction, the pause in which you decide how to respond, how strongly to respond, and how best to respond for the sake of the other. As French bishop Francis de Sales (1500s/1600s CE) wrote, "There is nothing as strong as gentleness, and there is nothing as gentle as real strength." This is why gentleness in the scripture is often contrasted with harshness, wildness, or aggressiveness.
4. Quite a few Christian and Christlike virtues, such as humility, kindness, and gentleness, were not viewed as positive or worthwhile traits in the 1st-century Greco-Roman world, which prized things like honor, power, success, and loyalty. In a word, Christian was countercultural - and it still is. Numerous studies, done by institutions such as Boston University and Siena College, have shown that Americans tend to share some common values or priorities - individuality, independence, personal freedom, hard work, informality, etc. But what never appears on those lists are things like compassion or gentleness. Speaking strictly from a biblical point of view, many who our culture might deem the most powerful are in fact the weakest. Brute force, trolling, being demanding or insistent, yelling the loudest, being belligerent...all of these signal the absence of real strength, not its presence.
5. Like with many other traits in Galatians 5.22-23, we are to be gentle simply because God is gentle. And how is God gentle? Like a shepherd, who carries us when we cannot walk, who holds us close to his heart so we can be calm, and who leads us because we don't possess the sight or wisdom to lead ourselves ([Isaiah 40.11](#)). Like kindness and peace, gentleness works in concentric circles: you must be grounded in a gentle God before you can be gentle to yourself, and you need to be gentle with yourself before you can be gentle to others.

6. The attitude and actions of gentleness appear all across scripture, more than you might first realize. For example, gentleness is crucial in how we respond to those who have made moral missteps, slipped into poor ethical choices, or just simply screwed up. Just a few verses after Galatians 5.22-23, Paul writes, "My brothers and sisters, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." Why? Because only gentleness can really heal, change, and restore a person, as writes Gary Thomas in his book on Christian virtue *The Glorious Pursuit*: "We can't shout people into righteousness...What they need more than anything else is to be overwhelmed with the reality of the gentle God who loves them. We can either break someone's spirit, drive them away from the faith and ourselves, or draw them closer by the virtue of gentleness. Only gentleness can open a heart to correction, learning, and growth."

7. Two more examples...First, consider Proverbs 15.4, "A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but vicious and distorted talk breaks the spirit." So if we are gentle in how we talk in any given situation, we have the opportunity to breathe life into it; if we do otherwise, we break hearts, wills, and people. Second, gentleness is to be a hallmark of Christian leaders, in how they treat others is a kind and motherly way ([1st Thessalonians 2.7](#)) and how they respond to those who disagree with them ([2nd Timothy 2.24-25](#)).

8. Just how widespread should gentleness be in our lives? The apostle Paul puts it best: "Let your gentleness be known to everyone, for the Lord is near" (Philippians 4.5). Toward everyone - those you like, those you don't, your family, your coworkers, your kids, and maybe most especially those who are not Christians who just might see in our gentleness the love of our gentle God. To cite that Gary Thomas book again, "No one has to earn my gentleness because I didn't earn God's gentleness toward me."

10. This poem, "Rain on Thirsty Earth," does a great job of picturing the beauty and capacity of both human and divine gentleness:

A soft and steady breeze, a whisper low,  
An open heart in which kindness grows.  
The sun's first rays, a balm upon the soul,  
A quiet strength, making the broken whole.

In patient ears, sorrow finds its quiet home  
And only in tenderness can weary hearts be known.  
The wise hand that guides, a helping grace,  
A smile that shines, in every time and place.

Like rain on thirsty earth, a soothing sound,  
Divine and human gentleness unbound.  
A way of being, an eternal light,  
Never false, always good, always right.

## A Week of Being Gentle

- Use the word pictures in point 2. in the sermon summary as a prayer or meditation prompt. Use one per day this week. Mull and reflect on how you can move in the world like those metaphors day by day.
- Focus on your words this week, namely using gentle words to bring life into even difficult situations.
- Be committed to pauses, momentarily and longer ones, because the restraint of gentleness occurs in pauses. Slow down, don't react quickly, measure your strength.
- Some short, inspirational reading on how to lean into the gentleness God's Spirit is trying to bring about in and through you:

[God's Gentle Partners](#)

[Finding Rest](#)

[Gentle ≠ Weak](#)

- And these are a little longer on the countercultural practice of gentleness:  
[The Counter-Cultural Virtues of Gentleness and Kindness - De Pree Center](#)  
[The Demise of Gentleness - Christian Scholar's Review](#)