

Nine
F r u i t s
of the
S p i r i t

A Bible Study on Developing Christian Character

Gentleness

R o b e r t S t r a n d



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Introduction

There is an ancient story out of the Middle East which tells of three merchants crossing the desert. They were traveling at night in the darkness to avoid the heat of the day. As they were crossing over a dry creek bed, a loud attention-demanding voice out of the darkness commanded them to stop. They were then ordered to get down off their camels, stoop down and pick up pebbles from the creek bed, and put them into their pockets.

Immediately after doing as they had been commanded, they were then told to leave that place and continue until dawn before they stopped to set up camp. This mysterious voice told them that in the morning they would be both sad and happy. Understandably shaken, they obeyed the voice and traveled on through the rest of the night without stopping. When morning dawned, these three merchants anxiously looked into their pockets. Instead of finding the pebbles as expected, there were precious jewels! And, they were both happy and sad. Happy that they had picked up some of the pebbles, but sad because they hadn't gathered more when they had the opportunity.

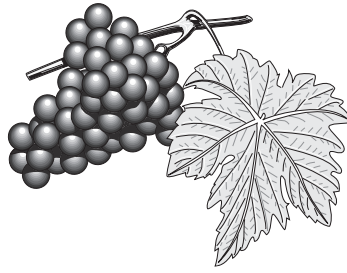
This fable expresses how many of us feel about the treasures of God's Word. There is coming a day when we will be thrilled because we have absorbed as much as we have, but sad because we had not gleaned much more. Jewels are best shown off when held up to a bright light and slowly turned so that each polished facet can catch and reflect the light. Each of these nine jewels of character will

be examined in the light of God's Word and how best to allow them to be developed in the individual life. That is how I feel about the following three verses from Paul's writings which challenge us with what their Christian character or personality should look like. Jesus Christ has boiled down a Christian's responsibility to two succinct commands: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and body, and love your neighbor like yourself. Likewise, Paul the apostle has captured for us the Christian personality in nine traits:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25).

At the very beginning of this study, I must point out a subtle, yet obvious, distinction. The "fruit" of the Spirit is a composite description of what the Christian lifestyle and character traits are all about — an unbroken whole. We can't pick only the fruit we like.

Unlocked in these nine portraits are the riches of a Christ-centered personality. The thrill of the search is ahead of us!



Gentleness

PRAOTES, (Greek), meaning: Gentle,
mild, meek, to be an
inwrought grace of the soul.

*THE FRUIT OF THE
SPIRIT IS . . . GENTLENESS*



GENTLENESS is not weakness! The truly meek person is one whose life has been empowered by the Spirit of God which comes from faith that has been energized by the Word of God!

When Jesus described himself as being “gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29), he was not without humility. His was not a life marked by weakness or stoic indifference to others and needs about him.

While living in Colorado, I was privileged to watch a bunch of wild horses that had been rounded up and culled out of one of the last of the free-roaming, wild horse herds in America. They were being unloaded from their trailers into a corral. As they were being handled, there was much wild-eyed looking about, bucking, and running about not

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(1 Pet. 3:4).



knowing what to expect. Totally untamed, unbroke, wild, and of not much value, they were being prepared for “adoption.” For a small fee and the proof that you could care for one of these and had some land on which they could pasture, anybody could adopt and train a wild mustang. They were beautiful to look at.

Later, I had the privilege of riding one of these mustangs which had been broken, tamed to accept a saddle, bridle, and a rider. This horse had been “meeked” so as to behave in a certain acceptable manner. It neck-reined perfectly; in fact, it had become meek enough so that a child could ride it. However, at no time had this mustang lost its power to run or carry a rider or to work cattle. What a picture of “gentleness” or “meekness.”

Most people upon hearing the word gentleness or meekness tend to immediately think of a

“Walter Mitty” type of character — not very desirable. This is a gross misunderstanding. Meekness is not weakness!

Michael Drury said: “Humility so often seems vaguely desirable, but not really attractive. It might get one to heaven, but it won’t promote a raise in pay. It sounds somewhat spineless, incompatible with intellect and a vigorous spirit.” In reality, the reverse may be true. Think of some of the figures from history which we normally associate with humility, and we discover that none of these were of timid nature: Moses, Jesus Christ, Lincoln, Gandhi, Einstein, Mother Teresa. Gentleness/meekness is not putting down of self with an affected false sense of humility, rather it is a tough, free, confident kind of characteristic. Very desirable. Meekness is first of all our attitude toward God and not man. When our attitude toward God is that of meekness, then, too, our attitude toward others will reflect the same kind of spirit. This is not a spineless kind of wandering-about in relationships, but a solid force which causes us to stand and do the will of God in the face of every obstacle.

This is one of the rarest of all the distinctively Christian graces. This is positively declared to be precious in the sight of God: “It should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Pet. 3:4).

HIS PLAN FOR ME

When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ
And He shows me His plan for me,
The plan of my life as it might have been
Had He had His way, and I see
How I blocked Him here, and I checked Him there,
And I would not yield my will,
Will there be grief in my Savior’s eyes,
Grief, though He love me still?
He would have made me rich, and I stand there poor,

Stripped of all but His grace,
While memory runs like a hunted thing
Down the paths I cannot retrace.
Then my desolate heart will well-nigh break
With the tears that I cannot shed.

I shall cover my face with my empty hands,
I shall bow my uncrowned head.
Lord, of the years that are left me,
I give them to Thy hand:
Take me and break me, mold me to
The pattern Thou hast planned.

(Martha Snell Nicholson)

GENTLENESS IS NOT BEING A WIMP



The person who has been really “gentled” by God, who is in the image of God in meekness, is the person who is directed by God. The goal in this study is to allow the Spirit of God to work on our inner character, conforming us to the image of His Son in all aspects of life, including gentleness and meekness.

Our first study sets the record straight — gentleness is not to be confused with weakness! Read again the account of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the day we have called “Palm Sunday” from Matthew 21:1–17.

Why is it that many of us tend to equate a gentle person with being a weak person?

What was the impact that the events of this had on the people of Jerusalem?

How is the gentleness of Jesus shown in these events?

What is the significance of the usage of palm branches at His entering Jerusalem?
