

Then God Said...Gentleness

Even people who don't know the Bible know of Psalm 23. I suspect everyone reading this right now can recite its beginning: "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*" This Psalm has entered literature as a classic.

As a pastor, when I meet with families to plan a memorial service for their loved one, I ask them what scriptures were comforting for their loved one, or what scriptures they find comforting. In response, they often say "Psalm 23." I think they choose this psalm as a source of comfort as it speaks of our gentle Lord.

Yet make no mistake about it. Because Jesus is comforting, because he is gentle, this does not mean he is weak. A gentle person has strength but can restrain it. Also, with Jesus, true gentleness is grounded in love.

For Christians, gentleness is one of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" The Spirit allows Christians to act as Christ did and would. We are to **act** and **speak** in strength, based on love. This should be evident to all, for as Paul writes, "*Let your gentleness be known to everyone.*" (Philippians 4:5) Such actions and words witness to Jesus, and they make this world a better place.

How so? Gentleness can be described as being kind, tender, soft. I think of it as having a light touch. It is a fruit that provides richness and has the potential for drawing out good in others, too. For example, and something to remember in this argumentative litigious time, gentleness can tone down a conversation before it escalates into an argument. Proverbs 15 offers ancient but still relevant wisdom: "*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*"

The world doesn't always meet gentleness with a positive response, however. Jesus' gentleness was met with the wrath of the ruling authorities who felt their power challenged by his words and his strength. Yet he submitted to their wrath gently.

But they did not win. God and goodness did. Jesus' death paid the debt for our sins, and in his resurrection, he defeated death and evil to bring abundant and eternal life for us. He died that we might live, gently.