

Deuteronomy 8:1-6, 18

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. <sup>2</sup>Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. <sup>3</sup>He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>4</sup>Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. <sup>5</sup>*Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.* <sup>6</sup>Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him.

<sup>18</sup>But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. <sup>2</sup>We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. <sup>3</sup>For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. <sup>4</sup>On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. <sup>5</sup>You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. <sup>6</sup>We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. <sup>7</sup>Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, <sup>8</sup>so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God

but our lives as well. <sup>9</sup>Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. <sup>10</sup>You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. <sup>11</sup>For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, <sup>12</sup>encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

## PRAY

In a Peanuts comic strip, Lucy is approaching her brother Linus, when she shouts at the top of her lungs: “GET OUT OF MY WAY!”

Observing this, Charlie Brown says to Linus: “I feel sorry for you. How can you stand it?” Linus replies: “I keep hoping someone will discover a cure for crabbiness!”

Gentleness is the fruit of the Spirit which is our focus today. Somehow, I don’t think that Lucy Van Pelt has an ounce of gentleness in her, or if she does it is buried deep within. She makes her way in the world through intimidation, and outright bullying. We, and Lucy and Linus, would do well to heed these words from Proverbs:

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

*The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.*

*The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.*

(Proverbs 15:1-2,4)

In our present culture, gentleness is considered to be weak, spineless. It is not considered particularly desirable. Likewise, in the ancient world, gentleness was not valued. Quite the opposite. Those who exercised authority with power and might, and yes, intimidation, were considered strong leaders.

Boasting was a carefully cultivated art form in ancient Rome. As much as things change, some things remain! In our own culture today, those who tend to dominate the news cycles are NOT those who are gentle and humble. These are *cultural* norms.

What is the *biblical* understanding of gentleness?

Gentleness is a bit ambiguous in both Hebrew and Greek, as well as in English. The ambiguity arises from the fact that the term can denote both strength and

vulnerability...It is a characteristic of peaceable kindness, the opposite of arrogance or domination. (MJ Evans, New Dictionary of Biblical Theology p. 306, IVP Press)

The fruit of gentleness finds expression in those who are confident enough within themselves and in their identity in Christ, that they have nothing to prove to others. They exhibit a non-anxious presence. The gentle person demonstrates “a conscious and dignified restraint of power.” (p.116 A Deeper Look at the Fruit of the Spirit, by Offner, and Larsen)

While Lucy feels compelled to threaten people with her coercive speech, a gentle person is not course or rude. Neither is he or she a doormat or a wimp. Instead a gentle person speaks “the truth in love”\*, and his/her word can be trusted. (\*Ephesians 4:15)

The Bible portrays God as both all powerful, and gentle. Numerous images of God in the OT, convey that God expresses the compassionate care of a loving parent, as noted in the passage from Deuteronomy as well as this one from Jeremiah 3:19, *“How gladly I would treat you like my children and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance...I thought you would call me ‘Father’ and not turn away from following me.”*

There is a tender, nurturing gentleness portrayed in this image of God from Psalm 91:1, 4.

*“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.”*

In the New Testament, Jesus himself invites us into a partnership with him.

*“Come here to me all of you who are working hard and carrying too much, and I will refresh you. Here, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble at heart, and you will experience refreshing deep down in your lives. You see, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (transl. of Matthew 11:28-30 by F. Dale Bruner)*

This invitation to all who are having a hard time of it, to all for whom life is tough, to all who are overwhelmed, exhausted, weighed down. Jesus promises not only refreshment but equipment, to lighten the load.

At first glance, one might think those who are heavy burdened need a few days off, a vacation! But what Jesus offers is a new way to live our lives, in partnership with Him. A yoke is an instrument or tool, designed for a pair of oxen. Together, two can pull a heavy load with greater ease. Since life will never be burden or problem free, Jesus offers is not escape but equipment, and a more effective way of coping. (F. Dale Bruner, Matthew, p. 437-442)

The yoke is not used while seated, but while walking in tandem. As we trust Jesus and walk through life, “yoked” together with him, Jesus shares the load. In that sharing of life’s load, we find rest and renewal. As we live our lives in partnership or relationship with Jesus, we shall learn from Him, remembering that the very word “disciple” means “learner”.

In his letter to the believers in Thessalonica, Paul describes his ministry among them utilizing some unexpected images. Although Paul and his colleagues were apostles with God-given authority, their ministry was not characterized by flattery or greed, by impure motives or trickery. In contrast...

*Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, <sup>8</sup>so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.*

*<sup>11</sup>For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, <sup>12</sup>encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.*

These ways of being - “as a nursing mother, as a father deals with his own children” - Paul describes not only their hard, unrelenting work, but their gentleness in dealing with the Thessalonians.

So what would it look like for the fruit of gentleness to be borne among us? A repeated image of God, and of Paul in relationship to the church, is that of a loving parent, who knows when to be tender, gentle and nurturing. While the role of a parent also involves discipline, we need to remember that the root of that word is found in “disciple” which means learner. Parents, and Paul as a ‘spiritual parent’ are significant teachers.

Think of the teacher or mentor in your life who most influenced you - let me venture a guess: that person was one who knew when and how to be gentle and nurturing, and when to encourage, challenge and set high expectations.

I wonder if we also don't get a clue from Jesus and his invitation to take his yoke upon us. Jesus teaches us that the rugged individualism which our culture so highly values, is not a healthy way of being in the world, but a recipe for burnout.

Gentleness is an inner strength which allows us both to acknowledge that there are times we need someone to come alongside to share our burden; while also acknowledging that on other occasions, we might be able to come alongside another, offering our strength and companionship when it is needed. That inner strength of gentleness allows us to both receive and to give.

Finally, I am not sure if Linus ever discovered a "cure for crabbiness" but I did find an online article (<https://www.canadianliving.com/health/mind-and-spirit/article/8-quick-cures-for-crankiness>) that suggested crabbiness (or crankiness) can be reduced by doing the following:

1. Call a loved one. Listening to that person's voice can have a calming influence.
2. Press the "pause" button four times a day, for five minutes at a time. This reduces the stress hormone cortisol, blood pressure and heart rate which will make you relax and feel better.
3. Smile and/or laugh—this has the same effect as #2. (There were more suggestions, but you get the idea.)

Perhaps the most important thing we can do, is look to the One who loves us best. (That was the message last week: "When we don't know what to do, our eyes are on You"/God). When we reconnect with our loving, gentle God, we are refreshed. Jesus promises refreshment when we take his yoke upon ourselves.

On further reflection: you function at optimum efficiency when two things are happening simultaneously. One, the weight of the load is distributed equally between two "oxen", and two, both move at the same speed, in the same direction (not running ahead or lagging!) The goal is to walk side by side, in sync with the Savior! Then God's Holy Spirit can refresh us and direct us in God's gentle, nurturing, life-giving ways.

PRAY....

Gentle us Lord, as you are a gentle shepherd, a compassionate caring parent, a loving Lord. May we respond to others out of a calm and non - anxious heart that is centered in Your heart. May your Spirit grow in us an abundant gentleness. Make us more like Jesus in whose name we pray...Amen.