

Gentleness

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Preacher: Jesse Kincer

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. As Lisa said, my name is Jesse. If you haven't met me, nice to meet you from afar, I guess, and I trust we can meet later on at some point. But glad you're here with us. If you're new, those listening online, glad you're listening. If you have a Bible, you can go ahead and open it up or open your phone up to it. It's a Psalm 18. That's where we're going to be at today, and starting in verse 31. And if you don't have a Bible with you, don't worry. We always put the verses up on the screens, and you can follow along there. And so, as Lisa said, we're continuing on, in our series on the fruit of the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit really means it's the character of God being formed in us, and that happens as we abide in God's presence and participate in the with God life, following Him in His ways and yielding to His ways. And today, we're going to be looking at gentleness. And arguably, I would say that's the most underrated, undervalued, underestimated virtue today. Nobody thinks much about gentleness. I guarantee you, the last 10 years, your New Year's resolution had nothing to do with gentleness, right? There aren't too many self-help books out there on becoming a more gentle person. In fact, it seems that we want the very opposite of gentleness. If you want to ruin a man's day, just tell him that he's gentle, right? We don't dig on that.

So, why would God care about us being gentle? Is gentleness really that big of a deal? Well, George Bethune, who was an old dead preacher from the 1800s, said this, Perhaps no grace is less prayed for or less cultivated than gentleness. Indeed, it is considered rather as belonging to natural disposition or external manners than as a Christian virtue. And seldom do we reflect that not to be gentle is sin. Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever thought that not being gentle could be a sin? But think about this. If God is the personification of righteousness and goodness, if he is gentle in spirit and in his ways, then it stands that when we behave without gentleness, we are not being God-like. We are falling short of his glory. Therefore, we are sinning. So, we should think, man, something that serious, if it's something that serious on the line that could lead us into sin, it would be good to be gentle, but also to kind of know what gentleness is.

So, let's take some time to answer that question first. What is gentleness? And for that answer, we're going to turn to Psalm 18, verse 31. It says, For who is God but the Lord? And who is a rock except our God? The God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the height.

He trains my hands for war so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You, God, have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great.

This is God's word. Now, we just read a small selection of this very long Psalm, right? There's more than 35 verses in this thing. So, already there's been 30 verses so far, and in it, what kind of precedes this to include these five verses that we read, David is describing God as this mighty power to save, the one who comes to rescue and redeem and to met out justice and to conquer his enemies.

[3 : 46] He likens God throughout this Psalm to a rock and a fortress and a refuge and a shield. He portrays God's presence as making the earth shake and mountains tremble. He heralds God as his deliverer, as his judge, as his rescuer. So, you get this picture of God, like David is painting this picture of God, who is almighty and strong and powerful and unstoppable and even, like, fearful.

Like, it's kind of God you want to be in his good books. But then we come to this small little blurb in verse 35 where David says, oh, by the way, God, your gentleness made me great. David gives 99% of the attention of that Psalm to amplifying God's power and then suddenly says, God is gentle. And this isn't cognitive dissonance. It is a God-defining truth about what gentleness is, and gentleness is power under God's control. So, let's be honest. When we think of gentleness, we don't think power, right? We don't think strength. We often equate gentleness with weakness. But that is actually to misunderstand gentleness altogether. John MacArthur, he says this, gentleness has nothing to do with weakness or timidity or indifference or cowardice. In fact, in the Bible, that word gentleness, it was used of wild animals that were tamed, especially of horses that were broken and trained. Such an animal still has a strength and spirit, but its will is under the control of its master. Biblical gentleness is power under the control of God. So, gentleness, as the Bible would have us understand it and how it is used is all this potential of power, but under control. And not just any control. It's under a specific sovereign authority, and hint, it's not you. And that sovereign authority has a specific purpose for that power. It's to be used for His glory and for our good. And that helps us understand gentleness a little bit more. Gentleness, there is a relational reality to it. Meaning, gentleness describes the essential trait toward which we are to treat others. No one better exemplified this kind of great power under God's control than Jesus. And in Matthew 11, 27, He's speaking and saying to His disciples that God, the Father, had handed over to Him all things to include power and authority and judgment. And these weren't just like, this isn't, this isn't Jesus like bloviating. He is like, man, He's got the goods behind it. These are more than just words. He's, He healed disease. He raised the dead. He could control the weather. That's some power, right?

That's some authority. Jesus is telling them, man, I got all the same authority and power that God has. But then He goes right into this invitation in Matthew 11, 29. Therefore, kind of because like, hey, I got all this authority handed over to me. So then take my yoke upon you and learn from me because I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. All this power, all this gentleness, that's who Jesus is. Look how Jesus is described by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 42, 1 to 3.

Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break and a faintly burning wick he will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice. See, Jesus, He was able to wield God's power, but He did it with a gentleness that cared and protected the wounded and the weak and the weary. He's, think about this, He's described as the powerful lion of Judah, and yet He is both that and the shepherd who cares for His little lambs. Jesus is the kind of leader we've stopped desiring in our day and age because, you know what, the gentle guys just don't get the job done. Our modern moment despises gentleness because from a particular perspective, the gentle lose. We want our leaders to win at all costs, don't we?

We want them to do that. We want the harsh, severe, get-it-done leaders in charge of the corporations where we invest stocks because we want our stock portfolios to rise. We want our prosperity to increase. We want our political party to maintain power. See, the world always uses its power for self-promotion, self-advancement, and self-aggrandizement. And it plays the short game of win now at all costs and maybe just pay for it later. But gentleness is so different. The gentleness of God is vastly different. What it does, it plays the long game because its power is under the control from the one who has eternal perspective. See, even if gentleness loses the moment, we still do it because that's living by faith. It's trusting that even though we may not see it fulfilled now, God's will has still been done, but maybe just yet to be realized. And that's okay.

[9 : 28] You may not see the fruit of it now. You may not even see the fruit of it in your time, but in the end, God's purposes will be accomplished and he will accomplish them through his gentle means. He will do that. So very practically, in what ways are we to be gentle? How do we bring it to bear in our lives?

Well, the Bible speaks about two. The first is our speech should be gentle. Proverbs 15, 4 says this, a gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

And here we get a good understanding of gentle speech because it's contrasted with perverseness. And perverseness is the quality of being stubborn or unyielding or unteachable or undisciplined.

And in short, it fights to be right. It uses, it's kind of careless with your words. It talks more than it listens. It refuses to yield. But a gentle tongue, a gentle tongue is wise. A gentle tongue conforms to the truth. A gentle tongue yields when appropriate. A gentle tongue seeks the benefit of others. Now, I'll be honest, I don't really like that verse. It gets in the way of all my good plans to efficiently and effectively solve my marriage problems, my parenting problems, and my work problems. But that's not God's way. A gentle tongue is a tree of life.

And similar to that, but more broadly, another way we're meant to be gentle is our treatment of others. Our treatment of others should be gentle. Now, there's a lot we can say about that. Like, situationally, we can get into a whole bunch of stuff, but I don't have enough time, and nobody wants to listen to a hundred-point sermon. So, on specific ways to treat people gently. But there are kind of meta-categories of how we are meant to be gentle towards others. And looking again at that psalm that we read in chapter 18, verses 31 to 35, we see that David describes God's actions and then says, man, your gentleness toward me made me great. Well, let's look at some of those actions. He says to God, you equipped me. You secured me. You trained me. You gave me a shield, the shield of your salvation.

[11 : 49] You supported me with your own hands. You took intimate care to care for me and lift me up. See, the gentle person is like God. The gentle person is generous toward others in ways that lift others up and enlarge their life. Think about the difference between a gentle person and severe person. A severe person engages in behaviors that oppress others. And they do that to enlarge themselves rather than enlarging others. But a gentle person doesn't do that. A gentle person engages in behaviors that make room for others to be great. And not just make room for them, do what they can to help and support them, push them towards making them great. Even if it comes at their own expense, a gentle person will do that. Think about this, friends. Is your direct influence enlarging others or not? Think about that in the different roles that you play in your life. Think about that as a spouse or a parent or a friend or a sibling or maybe a boss or a co-worker, whatever that may be.

Is your direct influence enlarging others or not? But that is God's call to gentleness. That is who he is calling us to be. It is great power to edify and exalt others. That's the kind of people he is calling us to be. So is that it? Got it, Jess? Let's just all go out and be gentle. Sounds great.

Sounds nice, right? But what happens when somebody yells at you or cuts you down verbally or rejects you or maligns you or mistreats you in a myriad of ways? Well, then we start to realize how hard it is to be gentle, right? Not so easy when that happens. And that is why we need God's help. We cannot do this on our own. He's called us to this gentleness even when it's hard. So an important question for us to answer is, how do we get this gentleness or how is this gentleness cultivated in our lives? Now, I'm sure that most of you are expecting me to say, Jesus. And that would be correct. Just not very clear or helpful, right? So to be more specific and helpful, I would say this. Gentleness is cultivated through union with Christ. Now, if that's a new concept to you, let me just say this about union with Christ. It is an essential part of the Christian faith. See, when you and I, when we believe in Jesus and we trust that he is who he says he is and you're saved and you're forgiven and your sins are washed away, yes and amen, those are beautiful truths and we, and those, those are just causes to celebrate. But I want to say this. We have many more promises secured by Jesus beyond that. Because we are one with him, we have these promises, which is to say we are in him and he is in us. And, and so how do you, how do you understand this union with Christ? And maybe this could be a helpful example. I hope it is. If not, we'll just check it away. All right. Have you ever been to a wedding and heard the preacher say, what God has joined together, let no man separate, right? Well, what he's getting at and what that is referencing is coming from Genesis 2 at the first wedding that ever happened between Adam and

Eve. And God was presiding over that wedding. And he said the two became one flesh. God made a one flesh union with the man and the woman in that moment. And that is kind of what happens, that kind of points to what happens when, when Jesus saves us, but in a non-romantic way.

In a non-romantic way, we are betrothed or wedded to him. And, and that idea of oneness, that idea with union with Christ is meant to describe the intimacy and the union and the participation that we have with our Savior. And trust me, we're getting the better end of that deal.

[15 : 49] All that is Christ is now ours, not some of it, all of it. The Father's love for him, ours. The Father's delight in him, ours. Jesus's sonship, ours. His righteousness, ours. His inheritance, ours. His gentleness, ours. All that belongs to Jesus, belongs to us through union with him. And all that to say, gentleness grows or cultivates in us as we grow with security in God's favor. Now, Martin Luther said it this way, the higher people are in the favor of God, the more tender they will be, the more gentle they will be. Friends, I'm going to say without a shadow of a doubt, that has been true in my life. I was the most insecure person in my teens and my twenties and my thirties. And I know what you're thinking, Jesse, you're only in your forties. I know it's a new thing for me. I regularly tore people down with my words to raise myself above them. If I felt disrespected, I would seethe and rage inwardly, wishing doom upon them for their impertinence.

If you challenged my leadership, good luck. You could say I had a major gentleness deficiency, and that was true. But at the root of that, the real problem that I had is that I had a low security in God's favor and who I was in him. That was my real issue. I was living as a prisoner to what Henry knew and named one of the lies we build false identities around, which is I am what others think or say about me. That was my big problem. My identity wasn't built around what God was saying about me. It was built around what others were saying or thinking about me. And here's the thing.

You can't be gentle when you're full of yourself. You can't. Whether that's always thinking about yourself or wondering about what others are thinking about you. You know, one of the key aspects to gentleness is humility. And I bring this up because humility isn't thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less. Martin Lloyd-Jones says it this way, the man who is gentle is not even sensitive about himself. He is not always watching himself and his own interests. He is not always on the defensive. To be truly gentle means we no longer protect ourselves because we see there is nothing worth defending. The man who is truly gentle never pities himself. He is never sorry for himself.

He never talks to himself and says, you are having a hard time. How unkind these people are not to understand you. To cultivate gentleness, you have to press into God's grace. You have to grow in understanding and know God's favor over you and what he says about you. You have to grow in that security.

And you know what? You have to grow knowing that his voice has to be greater than everyone else's. Friends, we have voices present and past echoing in our souls. And those voices work to drown out the benevolent and gentle voice of our Heavenly Father. There is painful words that mark us. And they may have been spoken by parents or siblings or teachers or friends or employers or coaches or any myriad. It can come from us from any myriad of ways. Now, I would say this. In one sense, we have to name those and renounce them as untrue. But also, we have to turn and we have to believe a better word, a truer word.

[19 : 30] We are told in the book of Hebrews that the blood of Jesus speaks a better word. We have to press into that truth to know it and believe it with all our being. If we don't, we are going to be trapped in a prison of false identity. And in that place, in that prison, gentleness and humility cannot grow. But other things will grow. Pride will grow. Selfishness will grow. Self-righteousness will grow. Being judgmental and legalism, it grows where there is a lack of gentleness and humility.

And all those things that grow, pride, selfishness, everything, those are all ways that we try to achieve greatness for ourselves apart from God. And the question we have to ask, are we willing to trade that for God's gentleness? Are we willing to let go of those things? All our pride, all our self-righteousness, being right all the time, being on top, winning all the... Are we willing to trade that for God's gentleness so that we can truly be great?

See, that's the upside-downness of God's kingdom. In God's economy, if you pursue greatness, you don't get it. But if you pursue gentleness, you will.

So how do you and I do this? How do you and I pursue this gentleness? Well, God's gentleness calls you and I to get lower. And that's terrible news until the gospel becomes good news.

And believe me, friends, there is nothing more beautiful than that truth. And it's why you and I are always grace-dependent. To be able to do this, to be able to imitate Jesus in this way, we cannot do it without God's help, without the Spirit's presence empowering us and sustaining us to continue to do that. This humbling, this getting lower is following Jesus.

[21 : 27] And look what it says about what Jesus did for us, Philippians 2, 5 to 11. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Looking at the life of Jesus, looking at what he did, it shows us gentleness takes humility, because gentleness calls us to go lower. It demands that we go lower. We spoke about union with Jesus, all those good things, all the favor that is his, that he shares with us so willingly, and yet this is a part of him also. And that's also who we are called to be. He is the one who went low to exalt the lowly. He exalted you and me. We were the lowly.

And he calls his disciples to imitate him and join him there. Think about it. Jesus was the one to whom every knee will one day bow. But before all that, you know what he did? He went lower than the angels.

He left heaven, came to earth, made himself like us, made himself a servant, and then he made himself lower than a servant. He got on his knees and washed his disciples' feet. There is not a lower position in that time that you can get than what he did right there. And then he made himself even lower than that. He made himself an object of scorn by going to death on a cross for us. He chose that. He went to the lowest place to rescue us so that we may be exalted through what he did. Therefore, God has highly exalted him. Friends, be amazed. Be lost in wonder. Be thankful and follow him in his gentle path of going lower. As the band comes up and we respond, if you're here and you're not yet a follower of Jesus, I want to say to you, I'm thankful that you're listening to this. I'm thankful that you get to see and discover that this Jesus, and he is so powerful, and yet he is gentle.

And I want to offer this to you. You can either live a very small and selfish life, making yourself great, or you can look to the gentle Savior who died for you.

In a moment, there's going to be an opportunity for you to respond. We're going to have a prayer up on the screen for you to pray, and I want to encourage you today. Pray that prayer. Believe on Jesus and who he says that he is. Put your trust in him and fall upon him. He has come to him. He is good. He is gentle.

[24 : 46] If you're here and you're already a follower of Jesus, we're about to take communion in a moment, but I just want to give us a moment to reflect. What has God been saying to you? What has he been stirring in your heart? And before you go to the table and get the bread and the cup and take it back to your seats and take it, before you do that, I want to give us a moment to just pray and go to the Father. Go to Jesus. Do business with him. So let me pray over our time that we're going to enter into right now, and then spend time communion with God, and then go to the tables, one of the tables around the room, and take communion when you're ready. So Father, we thank you. Jesus, our Savior, we thank you. Spirit of God, we thank you. You are the one who is all-powerful. You are the one who has all authority, and yet you are gentle. You are gentle with us who are lowly and weak and helpless.

Lord, we don't come to you with any arrogance. We come to you humbly. We move in our hearts, work in our hearts. Lord, I pray as my friends respond in the ways that you are leading them, that you would meet them in profound ways right where they're at.

Bless this moment. And as they come to take communion, your body broken for them, your blood shed for them. They would be reminded of the union that they have with you, Jesus Christ, that this points to.

Lord, and they would be, they would grow in security, that you, in your favor over them. That makes room for them to be gentle towards others. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.