

# **THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS GENTLENESS**

**Luke 19:1-10**

**Newbegun United Methodist Church**

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The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We are examining each of those nine fruit of the Spirit one at a time and we are just about through. Each week I have asked that we prepare our hearts to hear the message and take whatever good thing we can from it and then, apply the fruit we talked about for a whole week. We are also looking at the fruit of the Spirit as a fruit on a tree. Love is the blossom from which all the fruit is born. Therefore, joy is love rejoicing in all things, peace is love resting in the presence of God, patience is love enduring for love endures all things, kindness is love serving, goodness is love's motivation within us, and faithfulness is love proving to yourself the reality of your faith. Last week was the fruit of faithfulness. So how did you do? Did you follow through on all your commitments? Did you prove to yourself that your faith was real by taking a risk? Did you "step-out" in faith? Any stories on how you showed your faith in God last week?

Well, today we continue with gentleness. Gentleness is love touching. Have you ever seen the words "Fragile: Handle with Care" on a package? It makes you laugh, doesn't it? Those words are put on a package to protect the contents. In an ideal world such boxes would be gently moved from place to place and nothing would ever be damaged. However, in the real world I sometimes think "Fragile: Handle with Care"

means nothing. They are just words printed on a box that are meant to be ignored. Boxes in our shipping ports and handling places are thrown together and carelessly dropped. Everyday packages are opened only to reveal broken and damaged contents. It's a shame.

If I had one wish, I would like God to tattoo on every person the words "Fragile: Handle with Care." Maybe the words would be tattooed on our foreheads or on our wrists - someplace on our bodies that we would constantly see and then we could not ignore it. People are fragile, handle with care. How often is the heart of an individual crushed or the spirit broken? How often do we hear words and actions that wound everyday? Parents bring their children up to be tough; the streets are filled with meanness; we use our minds and bodies to cut, destroy, and damage all the while seeking the very thing we are begging for – gentleness; a holy, healing touch. Gentleness is love touching and the whole world is in denial about needing it. Gentleness is about healing and restoration.

As with many Greek words from the early manuscripts of Scripture, the Greek word "prah-ot-ace" can have several meanings. Aristotle used the word prah-ot-ace to mean the center between two opposing extremes. Prah-ot-ace was meant to find the balance of life. Translators of the Scripture have said the word means gentleness or meekness. OK, but here is the thing, gentleness and meekness do not mean weakness. Gentleness is the balance between absolute power and absolute weakness. Gentleness is focused, controlled power. That is why gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit for only under the control of the Holy Spirit can our human power be used in the way it was intended to be used – for healing and restoration. Gentleness is love touching.

An example can be seen in a small stream. When that stream floods its power is uncontrolled and it becomes destructive as the flood carries away people, livestock, cars, and buildings. Later, when the rains stop, the stream goes back to its little self and it just sits there like power being wasted. But what if you build a dam across the stream? Soon it becomes a lake that is controlled by the dam. No more flooding. And the water built up in the lake? It can now be controlled to turn turbines to produce electricity to help people. That is Holy Spirit gentleness, power controlled.

This is why it is so important to take the first step in practicing gentleness by submitting to God or giving God control. Without God in control of our lives then our touch becomes harmful and our words hurtful. Instead of helpful our touch becomes hurtful; painful rather than pleasing, selfish instead of selfless. Only as our strength is submitted to God, only as power is brought under the control of the Spirit through love, can we reach out and touch one another for healing and restoration.

The Gospels are full of stories of Jesus healing and restoring with his touch. There was a Samaritan woman who just touched his robe and was healed. There was a woman condemned for adultery who was restored. There was Zacchaeus, a hated tax collector. He was a cheat and a dishonest man who would never change his ways. Bitterness and resentment caused his community to push him away, not without reason! But even a perfectly good reason could not stop Jesus from recognizing Zacchaeus and bring salvation to his life. Why did Jesus not condemn these people and send them on their way? Because God is not like that. Psalm 103:10-11 reads, "God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is God's love." Gentleness is love touching for

healing and restoration. It is God controlling our individual power so that our power is used for healing and restoration. The world needs gentleness. One of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is gentleness, perhaps the greatest of all our strengths.

As I struggled with the concept of gentleness and what it means, two pictures from my memory came to me. The first one was a picture I saw in Life magazine as I was turning 17 and wondering if I would ever be drafted or not. Vietnam was on every one's mind at that time. At any rate, the picture I saw was of an Armored Personnel Carrier (APC) in the middle of a rice paddy. On the APC was a large machine gun and perhaps a dozen infantry men riding on top of it. The APC was stopped in the middle of this rice paddy and a Vietnamese peasant was holding up his child to the men on the APC. His face was haggard and very old looking. His eyes were pleading with the young men to take the child and help it. He was lifting up the child like giving a sacrifice to a God. But the men on the APC made no motion to help him. They couldn't. They were not equipped or able to help the man and the child. You could see in their eyes the hopelessness and the helplessness they had. There would be no gentleness today. All the power in that picture – the guns, the ammunition, the equipment, and all the uselessness they were to help a child in desperate need. Strength - uncontrolled.

The other picture was from April 19, 1995 at the federal building in Oklahoma City. It was a picture of a fireman coming out of the rubble with a small child in his arms. His face was blackened by smoke and ash; his equipment was dirty; his eyes full of concern. He was rushing to the ambulances with the child in his arms as fast as he could to save the child's life. A picture of gentleness - strength controlled by the Holy Spirit. Where will you practice your gentleness this week? Amen.