

Week 6 | Kindness & Gentleness

July 31 – August 6

Monday, July 31 | Be Gentle Toward Everyone

Read Titus 3:1–8

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Reflect

If you wanted to look up a word for the way we humans treat each other on social media (or elsewhere) these days, you'd need to search for an antonym of "gentle." Gentleness is out of style in our world. We'd rather be right than gentle. We'd rather make our point with gusto than be gentle. But one of the fruits of walking with the Spirit of God is gentleness—a mild-tempered softness toward those we encounter. The more we spend time with God, following in His ways and practicing love in the way He loves, the more gentleness will begin to characterize us. Conversely, as we distance ourselves from God or fall out of our spiritual disciplines (like prayer and meditating on Scripture), the more disagreeable and callous we will become.

- When you reflect on the level of gentleness in your life, what do you see? For example, are there certain arenas in your life in which you are gentle and certain areas in which you are more harsh? What accounts for the difference?
- Reflect on whether there is someone you know in whose presence you feel at rest and at ease. What is it about that person that makes you feel that way? How do you think people feel in your presence?

Respond

God, thank You for the opportunities You give me to practice gentleness. The world is so divisive and angry right now, but You have equipped me to be gentle and kind. Help me to resist the temptation to want to be right instead of loving and gentle. Reveal to me the ways I come off as harsh or disagreeable, and give me the ability instead to be mild-tempered and soft-hearted toward those I encounter, whether online, at work, in the community, or at home. Amen.

Tuesday, August 1 | A Gentle Answer

Read Proverbs 15:1–4

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 eyes of the Lord are everywhere,
keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

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

Reflect

Words can be so life-giving! When someone speaks words of encouragement to us, our spirits tend to rise and we feel empowered and light. When someone speaks words of love to us, we feel valued and safe. Yet, words can also be so destructive. And sometimes, harsh words sneak out of our mouths before we can catch them. Other times, we say harsh words on purpose. Think of the last time you had an argument with someone. Chances are, someone said a harsh word and tempers flared or one person was hurt. Gentle words are a gift in the midst of an argument. They are a surprise. Gentle words diffuse arguments and soften hearts. God calls us to be different from the rest of the world—a light in the darkness. In a world in which harsh words are the norm, are we, followers of Jesus, any different?

- How are you doing when it comes to your words? In what situations recently have you used them to diffuse tension and bring life? In what situations recently have you used them to stir up controversy or to hurt? Is there someone you need to apologize to and from whom you need to seek forgiveness?
- What circumstances or relationships tend to lead you into speaking harshly with others? (For example, is there a particular subject that triggers you? Are there certain people who bring harshness out in you?) Spend a moment listening for what you sense God inviting you to do about those circumstances or relationships?

Respond

God, help me to be aware of the words I use and how I use them. I want only to build people up, to encourage them, and to bring gentleness and respect to conversations. Guide me in knowing when I am more apt to respond harshly, and convict my heart when I run afoul of gentleness with my words. May I be a person who people see as a gentle presence—gentle in words and gentle in spirit. Amen.

Wednesday, August 2 | Gently Restore

Read Galatians 6:1–10

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Reflect

In this passage, Paul provides a seemingly disconnected series of instructions about how those who are part of the Galatian church should engage with one another. He starts by acknowledging that there will continue to be sin among those who follow Jesus and are part of the church. Of course we know this from experience! And when someone in the church is “caught”—meaning overtaken by sin not discovered—they are to be restored to the community gently, with compassion. The temptation can be to want to rid the church of someone who has been overtaken by sin immediately in order to protect the community, but, Paul encourages compassion, gentleness, grace, and forgiveness, echoing Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15 and James' teaching in James 5:19. Not that it's easy, but seeking to restore a believer who has fallen into sin back into community should always be our desire as followers of Jesus, the ultimate granter of grace and compassion. Further, Paul counsels us to keep a close eye on ourselves, never believing we are better than others or immune to sin.

- Reflect on the last time you heard of another person in your church (or in the broader church) who had been overtaken by a sin. How did you respond (with anger, compassion, judgment, gentleness, disappointment, fear, or some combination)?
- As you think about gentleness as a fruit of the Spirit to cultivate, what are some practices or relationships that you think would help you act with gentleness more often and grow in that particular fruit? What would it take to incorporate those practices and relationships into your life more?

Respond

God, thank You for the gift of grace and restoration through Jesus Christ. Thank You for pursuing me and saving me. I want to model that grace and restoration in this world, and pray that You would grow a gentle spirit in me toward those who are caught in sin. Help me be a person who can

reach out and begin the process of restoration in the way I show compassion and love. Protect me in the process from being prideful about my own tendency toward sin. May I be an ambassador of Christ, extending grace, forgiveness, and mercy. Amen.

Thursday, August 3 | Let Your Gentleness Be Evident

Read Philippians 4:4–7

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Reflect

Perhaps it is too obvious to say, but the fruit of the Spirit is something that should be evident to anyone who spends any amount of time with us. Those who cross our path should wonder what could possibly make us so joy-filled, peaceful, gentle, and kind. They should walk away asking where those qualities came from and wishing they too could experience them. It is often the fruit of the Spirit that invites people into a conversation about Jesus. If we are kind when most people would respond with anger, someone will notice. If we are gentle in tense situations and at peace in moments of chaos, heads will turn. And if we have an abiding joy we carry around as we move through the world, people will want to know why. In short, people will be drawn to us as we demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, and as they are drawn to us, we have the opportunity to share the good news about Jesus as the one in whom we have life and through whom we can live in joy, peace, gentleness, and kindness.

- What are three words you think people might come up with after spending time with you? Would they say you are gentle and joy-filled? Or do you seem tense and worried? Ask a few people you know to tell you three words that come to mind after they spend time with you.
- Identify someone in your life whose character and presence you admire and want to emulate. If you are able, ask them to help you understand what their practices or rhythms they have in place to cultivate the character you see.

Respond

God, thank You for the reminder of Your nearness and of the qualities I can develop as I spend time in Your presence. I want to be different. I want others to find kindness and healing in my presence. I want them to know that my source of life is not found in this world, but rather comes from You and Your love. Help me to abide in You so I can demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, and give me opportunities to share Your love with others. Amen.

Friday, August 4 | Gentle and Humble in Heart

Read Matthew 11:27–30

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Reflect

These are words of Jesus inviting us to cast our burdens upon Him, find rest in Him, and learn from Him. He is gentle and humble in heart. But we know Jesus wasn't timid or afraid. He wasn't willing to leave people stuck in sin or unwilling to speak truth. Sometimes gentleness can be interpreted as weakness or shyness. Gentleness, though, as we see it in Jesus, is a kind of generosity of spirit that extends compassion and grace while speaking truth and standing unafraid. When we put it this way, it becomes obvious why the Holy Spirit's guidance is so critical. It is no small task to be simultaneously truthful and gentle.

- Reflect on some situations we read about from Jesus' life in which He is both gentle and truthful. What do you notice about those situations? (For a couple of examples, see the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–26 or of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1–11.)
- How do you do with balancing truth and gentleness? Does truth come out harshly? Do you avoid telling people the truth out of fear? Spend a couple of minutes praying for what you need if these elements are out of balance.

Respond

God, thank You for the gift of Jesus. Of course, words don't suffice to really express my gratitude. But, as best as I know how, I open my life to You and ask that You would help me model the character of Jesus. Grant me the courage to tell the truth and the grace to be gentle and generous. Fill me with love that spills over to those I encounter. May I be led in every way by Your Spirit today. Amen.

Saturday, August 5 | What Kindness Looks Like

Read Ruth 1:3–18

Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Reflect & Respond

- Read through today’s passage two or three times, slowly, noticing what stands out. Remembering you are in God’s loving presence, pray that He would show you how the particular words or phrases that stood out apply to your life right now. Pray that God would give you insight, wisdom, and courage, along with the power of the Holy Spirit, to act as He’s calling you.

Sunday, August 6 | Praise the Lord, My Soul

Read today’s psalm as your prayer.

Psalm 103

Praise the Lord, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,

who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.

He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.

He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he 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 his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;
the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.

But from everlasting to everlasting
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children—
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over all.

Praise the Lord, you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.

Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts,

you his servants who do his will.

Praise the Lord, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.
Praise the Lord, my soul.

A Way to Cultivate Kindness This Week

Listening well is a way of filling all of our interactions with gentleness, but listening is more than paying attention to someone. When we listen as a spiritual discipline, we are attentive to the other person *and* the Holy Spirit. Growing in this discipline will form us into the kind of people who respond to the leadings of the Spirit and share the tender strength of gentleness in every relationship.

- In the morning, pause to consider your day. Is there a specific person (a family member, coworker, or friend) or a particular space (a meeting, social media, or some gathering) where you will need to be most intentional about practicing the spiritual discipline of listening?
- Ask God to direct your thoughts, and listen for His response.
- With the people or in the space God identified, slow down and listen carefully to the Holy Spirit and to those with whom you interact.
- Be bold as you respond to God's leadings.