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"Fruit-Full: Gentleness"

Ephesians 4:1-6

Galatians 5:22-23

Opening

- For quite a few weeks now, we've been examining the Fruit of the Spirit, looking at the qualities which are visible, when we allow God's Holy Spirit to work in us.
 - o There are nine fruit and each represents the character we hope for as followers of Jesus.
 - o Are you ready to say them with me? Let's give it a try, shall we.
- **By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.**
- Alright, very good—I think we've almost got that scripture down.
 - o Once you have it, be sure and get your prize from either Sandra or I.
- So, I want to ask—how are you and God doing these days?
 - o Are you feeling the Spirit?
 - o We've been focusing on the Fruit of the Spirit for what might seem like a long time and I hope you're not growing tired.
 - After today, we have just one more to go, so we are nearly there.
 - o This past week I realized I am now more aware of the Holy Spirit and of my own need to allow the Spirit to work in me to produce good fruit.
 - I now wake up in the morning, realizing that today, I will have opportunities to get my humanness out of the way and allow the Spirit to work.
 - That is a benefit of staying focused on this as we have and I just wonder, how it is for you?
 - Are you waking up in the morning, more mindful of your opportunities to meet the Spirit?
 - Are you recognizing moments in your day, where you're about to act in a particular way or about to say something and then you catch yourself?
 - And perhaps say to yourself "I need to let the Spirit work on this?"
 - As followers of Jesus, it is our hope that when people look at us, they will see the fruit of the Spirit in us.
 - They will see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
 - o These qualities are there—God put them there.
 - But sometimes it's hard to see that.
 - The nature of our humanness gets in the way and causes us to stumble.

- And yet, it is still our hope to continually be shaped by the Spirit.
 - Because we don't want to remain stuck where we are. We want to be better.
 - Our job is to open ourselves and invite the Holy Spirit to continue to shape who we are.
 - And when we are able to get our humanness out of the way, that is the Spirit will cultivate good fruit in us.

Gentleness: Strength Under Control

- Well today, we are looking at Gentleness.
 - I looked up “Gentleness” in the dictionary to find the synonyms for the word and I found words like mild, calm, kind, tender, moderate, temperate, placid, soft, quiet, and light.
 - And the Greek word can be translated as “meekness.”
- When we think about these synonyms, we might think of someone who is weak, or spineless. Someone who is a wimp, so to speak.
 - But that's not at all what we're talking about here.
 - Jesus was meek, mild and tender-hearted, but he was NOT weak.
 - In Luke 22:42 when Jesus says “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done”, does that sound like the words of a weak man?
 - No, and to willingly face death as he did, would take more strength than 10 men.
 - And so, Jesus is one of the strongest humans ever to live.
- To be gentle does not mean to be weak.
 - It means to have strength – and have it harnessed – have it under control.
 - It is humility and meekness, revealed through a strength of character which is unparalleled.
 - That's the sort of gentleness we're talking about.
 - That's who Jesus is and that's who the Spirit calls us to be.

We Tend Towards the Opposite

- And our natural tendency is towards the opposite.
 - Our inclination is to lack control.
 - Rather than offer a controlled response, it's natural that we react with a harsh word, or say something abrupt, something we ought not say.
 - Or we might make demands, to get our way.
 - This past week, I was having a conversation with someone in my office and this person in a demanding tone, gave me one of those “I won't do that unless...” statements.
 - Now my natural tendency was to reply “You'll do it, if I tell you to do it.”

- How do you think that sort of response would be received?
 - I'm pretty sure that the result of that would not be good fruit?
- So, I caught myself before saying that and I thought to myself, "Holy Spirit, I think I'll let you drive for this moment."
 - I could have exercised brute force in the situation, but instead I simply asked a question, "Where do you think that is going to get us?"
 - And in the end, I'm glad I didn't lose it, because doing what came natural to me, would only have caused pain and would have strained the working relationship I have with my colleague.
- As I was preparing for this sermon, I was remembering an incident from years ago, where the person travelling in a car behind me apparently thought I was going too slow, because they were passing me and we were in a no passing zone.
 - As he drove around me, I glanced his way, just in time to see him giving me a sign that expressed his displeasure with me.
 - It was a familiar sign, a raised finger that says to the recipient "you are not number one in my book!"
 - Now what do you think that made me feel? What do you think I felt like doing in response?
 - You guessed it – I wanted to let him know that he wasn't number one in my book either!
 - That was years ago and yet I still remember it and it reminds me of the words of wisdom from Proverbs 15:1
 - "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."
 - These days, I find a friendly wave is more effective in diffusing a tense situation.
 - So, sometimes, we get things right and other times we realize that the Holy Spirit still has some work to do.
- And it's important that the Spirit continues to work in us
 - Because relationships are a lot like the fruit banana.
 - They can be easily bruised.
 - And once one has said or done the wrong thing, it's pretty hard to un-ring that bell.

Gentleness: Changing Our Approach

- Becoming a person of gentleness may mean making some changes, as we allow the Spirit to take over.
- **It may mean becoming less demanding.**
 - In Philippians 2:3, the Apostle Paul writes "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves."
 - Paul is saying it's OK to look out for and help the other guy, even if it means we don't get our way."
 - What is your response to others around you, when you're not getting your way?

- Do you make demands? Do you get pushy, having to have the last word, trying to have things as you want them to be?
 - Are the words you use critical?
 - Or do your words build up others around you?
 - Perhaps it might help to remember that everyone around you is going through their day just as you are—and their day may be a good one or a bad one.
 - With the Spirit's help, maybe you can step back, pause just a little bit and understand their need and then ease up on your own agenda.
 - If we are less demanding and more understanding of those around us, we reflect gentleness.
- **Becoming a person of gentleness, may mean letting go of our prejudices and biases and becoming more accepting of others.**
 - Especially others who don't think like us or act like us or look like us.
 - We would do well to remember that we all are part of the same family. We're part of God's family.
 - And while families may argue, fuss and fight, they don't stop being a family.
 - No family is perfect and so we do our best to get along.
 - And that means accepting one another for who we are, short comings and all.
 - Feelings of rejection can create life-long hurt that leads to anger.
 - By contrast, few things feel better than belonging to a family.
 - As members of God's family, we experience God's acceptance.
 - And each Sunday, we come here and confess our shortcomings to God and in so doing, we experience God's gentleness and forgiveness and grace.
 - And God says to each of us, go forth and do likewise.
- **Becoming a person of gentleness, may mean being more thoughtful towards others.**
 - The book "How to win friends and influence others" written by Dale Carnegie is one of the greatest selling business books of all time.
 - In his book, Carnegie shares extensive advice on achieving success in business, by establishing strong relationships with people.
 - Carnegie offers that your success bears a direct relationship with how thoughtful others perceive you.
 - And being thoughtful, means showing another person respect, being courteous to them and showing an interest in them.
 - Being thoughtful helps establish a strong bond of friendship, which will lead to success.
 - "If we want to make friends," writes Carnegie "let's put ourselves out to do things **FOR** other people – things that require time, energy, unselfishness and thoughtfulness."

- There is an old axiom which sums up this idea simply: “You can catch more flies with honey, than with vinegar.”
 - It is easier to persuade others with a polite response and a positive attitude, rather than with a rude reaction and negativity.
- When someone hurts you, how do you react?
 - Do you retaliate with harsh words to cut them down to size?
 - Do your words inflict pain back?
 - Or do you respond with words of healing and resolution?
 - In Ephesians 4:29, Paul expresses the difference between an emotional reaction and a thoughtful response when he says “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”

Father’s Day

- Last weekend was Father’s Day weekend
 - And on Saturday my brothers and I all got together with our families, to catch up, enjoy a meal and be together.
 - During the celebration, our conversation naturally turned to our father who had passed during the preceding year.
 - We were all missing him and we began to share memories of him.
 - And as we were talking and sharing stories about him, I realized that years from now, my family will all be together, celebrating a holiday and sharing memories of me.
 - And I thought to myself “What will they remember about me, after I’m gone?”
 - And my prayer is that they’ll remember me as a gentle person.
 - I hope my kids will talk about how much I loved them and how I always encouraged them and built them up.
 - I want to be remembered for my positive support and acceptance of who they are.
 - And I hope they can say, “Even when he wasn’t at his best, my father was a gentleman.”
 - And today, one of my fears is that they will have memories of times when I wasn’t gentle.
 - When I was short, or critical or used words that hurt.
 - I don’t want to be remembered like that.
 - And so, I’m still open, looking for the Holy Spirit to work in me.
 - I’m hoping that the Spirit will continue to cultivate more gentleness within me.

Wrap it up

- In his book *Grace for the Moment*, Max Lucado offers a pledge which I think we could all make our own.

- “Nothing is won by force.” He says, “I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice, may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.”
- As we seek gentleness in our faith journey, may this pledge resonate in our hearts.
- Amen.