

Today we are continuing our study of the 10 KEY VIRTUES of the Christian life. Here's a little video on Galatians 5:22-23—"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Watch the video and let's name the virtues out-loud as they come up on the screen.

VIDEO: "Fruit of the Spirit" by Fervent

Let's talk about GENTLENESS. Have you ever received a package that was beat up or crushed? You opened it up and what did you find?—the contents broken and destroyed. Maybe your package was marked with the words "Fragile: Handle with Care. In a perfect world these packages would be treated with extreme gentleness and carefully moved from place to place. But not everyone reads the words stamped on the outside of the box. Do you know, last year 1 out of 10 packages arrived in American homes with some kind of damage? Boxes get thrown together, packages fall off conveyor belts, what's inside gets broken. Unfortunately the words "Handle with Care" get overlooked. What would happen if God put a "Handle with Care" label on people? Would we ignore that too? I'm sure you've seen what I saw the other day in the Giant store—a parent berating their young child for some misbehavior. How often is the spirit of a child crushed or the heart of a person broken because of our harsh words—words that have the power to wound and destroy.

There's an old children's nursery rhyme—"Humpty Dumpty"—do you know it? Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall; Humpty Dumpty had a great fall; All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again." These words were originally written about people whose lives were broken and smashed. Sometimes "all the king's horses and all the king's men" can't put a life back together again—but God can! The spirit of GENTLENESS can make our broken lives whole again.

Paul said, "The fruit of the Spirit is ... GENTLENESS." The Greek language, in which the New Testament is written, is a very exact language. The Greek word for GENTLENESS is "πραοτης" (prah-ot'-ace). And the Greeks illustrated this word with a picture of a wild horse that had been brought under control. When a wild horse has been tamed and its spirit has been brought under the control of its owner we say, "The horse has been gentled." So, GENTLENESS is power that has been brought under control and focused on a purpose.

Have you ever been down to Smith Mountain Lake in southern Virginia? If you have you've seen the lake—20,000 acres of water behind the Smith Mountain Lake Dam. And within the dam--five huge generators. When the water is released, it flows through the turbines and produces the electricity to power the entire Roanoke Valley. But imagine if the dam broke--the uncontrolled power of the water released. It would flood the valley and cause a tidal wave of destruction. GENTLENESS is power under control. My friends, our words and actions have a power either to build up or to tear down. GENTLENESS occurs when our words and actions are under the control of the Spirit of God.

How do you learn GENTLENESS? Think about how a horse is tamed. It can be done in one of two ways. It can be done forcefully or it can be done gently. Two weeks ago they ran the Kentucky Derby. Yesterday the Preakness. If you watch the races, you notice the jockeys carry a whip. That whip has a purpose—to force the horses on to their greatest effort. But a horse can also be tamed gently--with a quiet word or a lump of sugar. Horses can be tamed forcefully or they can be tamed gently. And the same is true for us. God can teach us GENTLENESS in different ways. Sometimes we learn by the example of his gentle touch. At other times we learn GENTLENESS through hard and difficult life circumstances.

I want to share with you a couple of examples of how Jesus modeled GENTLENESS for his disciples. The first story is in John 4. It's the story of a Samaritan woman that Jesus met at a well. This woman was separated from Jesus by three barriers. First, she was a woman and rabbis did not speak to women.

Second, she was a Samaritan and Jews did not speak to Samaritans. Third, she was a moral failure. How could the sinless Son of God have anything to do with her? But the GENTLENESS of our Lord Jesus Christ reached beyond the barriers of prejudice and convention and touched the life of this woman through her touched the lives of every person in the town.

The second story is the story of Zacchaeus from Luke 19. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. People hated Zacchaeus because he cheated them out of their money. People looked at him with bitterness, anger, jealousy and hatred. They wanted nothing to do with him. But when Jesus found Zacchaeus up in a sycamore tree, what did he say?—"Zacchaeus, you come down. For I'm going to your house today." The gentle touch of Jesus transformed Zacchaeus' life and Jesus said, "Today, salvation has come to this house."

I'm sure you know John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." We give thanks for these words and the fact that Jesus Christ has come into our hearts and lives. But did God mean these gentle words to stop once they had reached us?—Of course not! And there's so much more! In the very next verse—John 3:17—we read: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save it." Jesus wants to use your words and actions—not to condemn the world.. He wants to gently touch your neighbors, your friends, you family and your co-workers through you.

I want to tell you the story about a woman named Violet. Violet's father died in 1969. Before he died he gave he an antique pitcher and a wash basin that had been in her family for generations. It was Violet's most prized possession. It reminded her of her father. Violet kept it on display in a very special spot in her home. One day some friends came over with their dog. Somehow the dog's leash got wrapped around the leg of the little table on which the pitcher and wash basin were displayed. Before anyone could stop it, the pitcher and the basin tumbled to the ground and shattered into a thousand pieces. It was a tragedy. Her husband said, "I watched as Violet very quietly took a dust pan and picked up every piece of that broken basin and pitcher. She kept all the pieces. And every evening she would bring out the ceramic glue and glue the pieces back together again."

That's what God says we need to do as a church. That's what God says we need to do as his followers. That's what it means to live with a spirit of GENTLENESS. We have two goals: First of all, to realize how gentle God has been with us—how many times he could have punished us, but instead he forgave us. He reaches out, takes us in his arms, and gently holds us close to his heart. And our second goal?—Well, you know what that is—to take God's spirit of GENTLENESS and live it out in your own life in your relationships with others. I like what Max Lucado has to say about GENTLENESS: "I choose GENTLENESS. Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice may it be only in praise. If I clench my fists may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand may it be only of myself."