

The Fruit of Gentleness

SCOTT HOEZEE

Go to Google Images and type in the word *gentle*. The pictures you will see will be exactly what you expected: Kittens, lambs, puppies, images of a person cradling a small bird in his hand, of someone stroking a child's soft hair. What you will not see are any super heroes. No Batman, no Wonder Woman. What you will not see are any politicians; no George Bush, no Justin Trudeau. That is because gentleness, we think, is nice but it does not get much done. It is not strong or assertive; and so, though gentle things might make you relax and sigh happily, to accomplish anything, you'd best turn elsewhere. But as a fruit of the Spirit, is that true of gentleness, or is there more to it? We will wonder about that today on *Groundwork*. So please, stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is probably the longest series I think we have ever done on *Groundwork*; a nine-parter; and we are bringing it in for a landing. This is program number eight. We have been rooting this series, in terms of the list of the fruit, of course, in the classic location in the New Testament, Galatians 5:22, 23, where Paul says the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; and we are down now to those last two; gentleness on this program and self-control on the next one.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we have said a couple of things more than once in the course of this series. One is that these things pop up all over the Bible; not just in the New Testament, but in the Old. They are repeatedly taught as the basic virtues or qualities that Christians should exhibit, that we should be interested in pursuing and growing and developing, the metaphor of fruit or produce or a harvest in our lives; and we have also said repeatedly that these all characterize God himself, and Jesus in particular. That to have the fruit of the Spirit increasingly evident in our lives is another way of saying we will become more and more like Jesus, we will become more and more Christlike in our attitudes and in our actions toward others; and that is certainly true of the fruit of gentleness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we return now to a passage from Matthew 11 that we have looked at before also in connection to kindness in this series. Matthew 11, where Jesus has those wonderful pastoral words: ²⁸Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; ³⁰for my yoke is easy (or kind, as we said in the fifth program in this series) and my burden is light.

"I am gentle and humble in heart." Of course, we know that characterized Jesus, but it also...here is a good chance to remind ourselves of something else, and that is that a lot of theologians think that humility is the core virtue. Now, it is not one of the fruit of the Spirit, but if you do not have humility, you will not have anything else.

DAVE BAST

And if you think about it, humility is the anti-pride, isn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

And just as pride is the chief of the sins—it is the first of the deadly sins—it is the root and source of all the other sins. Ultimately, you can trace everything back to pride, to this being full of ourselves; humility is the opposite of that, it is emptying ourselves, and the great quality that described Jesus. You think of the famous Christ hymn in Philippians 2, where Paul introduces it by saying: Have this mind in you, which is also in Christ Jesus, who emptied himself and took the form of a servant. He just humbled himself lower and lower...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, even to the death on the cross, he humbled himself. And humility, we should say, is not the same thing as humiliation. Humility is basically how you look at all of life, and how you view other people. If you are a humble person, what it means is, you see all of life as a level playing field. As you just said, Dave, that humility is the opposite of pride; and when we have looked at pride before here on *Groundwork*, we have noted that proud people...all the images are attached to height: On your high horse; getting uppity; looking down his nose at other people; thinks too highly of himself. Humility is not about height, it is about a level playing field, where we see...

DAVE BAST

Or even getting low.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes...where you see everybody at eye level.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We all have different abilities, right? We are not all good at the same things, which inevitably means in the Church some people do things that are more visible than others, but life is a level playing field, where we see each other at eye level and we value everybody.

DAVE BAST

Yes; in fact, the word humility is related to the word *humus* for earth...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

For getting down...and this especially marked Jesus in his earthly life and during the course of his ministry, which is really pretty amazing if you stop and think about it. He was the Lord of Glory...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right!

DAVE BAST

He was the God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

If ever somebody could look down his nose...

DAVE BAST

Yes, he is the firstborn over the whole creation. Think of those passages later that describe him in his exaltation; and yet, you see it on Palm Sunday, when he comes into the city to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah: ^{9:9}See your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a donkey. So, Jesus set it all up, and there is a clear sense in the Gospels that this was pre-arranged—his entry into the city on Palm Sunday—choosing to ride on a donkey...on a humble animal of peace, not on a warhorse, not on a charger, not an elephant, not on a tiger...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; which some of the disciples would have liked.

DAVE BAST

Yes; but on a donkey. He was humble.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that means that you do not treat other people as underlings; you do not treat other people as not worthy of my time, not worthy of my respect, not worthy of my considerate treatment of them; no, humility means we see everybody as equal, and that means you are going to be gentle with them, because if you see everybody as your equal, you are not going to shove somebody aside; you are not going to step on them like you are climbing, you know, the corporate ladder; you are not going to bark at another person because you think: Well, you know, I mean, I am in charge, so I can just, you know, speak harshly to this person...

DAVE BAST

Or call them names or demeaning nicknames or...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or shaming them.

DAVE BAST

Or racial epithets. You think of all that behavior, which is a form of putting people down, of stressing that they are lower than I am, and humility turns away from all that, and instead embraces gentleness—the gentleness and respectfulness that we have toward others as creatures made in the image of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, if Jesus could do it, right, as the holy one, as the sinless one, as the one who, by all rights, could have gotten on his high horse, literally and metaphorically, and spoken harshly to the disciples when they made mistakes, or to people who were just kind of clueless, but he didn't. We know that that is not how...and that is why people were so attracted to Jesus, too, including sinners who got spoken to plenty harshly by the Pharisees. They would never dare go near a Pharisee because they were just going to get their head bit off; but somehow, those same people found Jesus magnetic.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, we associate gentleness with Jesus. It is a function of humility. If you do not have humility, you are unlikely to be gentle; but you also said, Scott, that we never associate it with powerful people in the world, like politicians and the like; and yet, there is a certain power in gentleness as well; and Jesus was far from weak, so let's explore the connection between power and gentleness in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are looking today at the spiritual fruit of gentleness, and we had just been saying, Dave...and we said in the opening to this program, too...we generally never associate gentleness with power or with powerful people; and indeed, you do not get far by being known for your world-class gentleness. You cannot imagine a bumper sticker saying: Vote for Smith, a real lamb of a guy. You know: Make America gentle again. I do not think these are political slogans that would take off.

DAVE BAST

Right; or as the old ballplayer, Leo Durocher famously said: Nice guys finish last...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So we do not associate winning with being nice, or power or strength with being gentle.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In truth, all of us would love to be on the receiving end of gentleness. We all like to be treated in a gentle way by store clerks or police officers or teachers or our friends; but gentle people are also sometimes easy targets to get roughed up or shoved aside, or you become the world's doormat, because we think gentleness means just sort of laying there and not making any waves. Again, it is the opposite of effectiveness in a lot of peoples' minds; and yet, we were just saying in the previous part of this program, Dave, Jesus was gentle, and he was the all-powerful Son of God...

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Soooo....

DAVE BAST

Well, and here is how this paradox is expressed with respect to Jesus and his character—his nature: A paradox of gentle strength, of great power and also great humility. One of the ways it is most profoundly expressed, I think, in the New Testament is by describing Jesus as the Lamb or a lamb, and especially we think of that, you know, earlier in the book of John he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and he is the lamb who is sacrificed, and all that; but in the book of Revelation, Jesus is depicted still as a lamb, even in Glory...even in his transcendence.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and what is interesting is that you referenced John 1, where John the Baptist seemed to have coined a new phrase: The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. No one in the whole Bible had ever been called the Lamb of God before, and never is again. It is only in John 1 twice. Even in Revelation, the exact phrase: Lamb of God is not used. So you wonder, what did those first people hear? The Lamb of God. Well, lambs were used for sacrifice. Lambs were slaughtered...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, maybe that did not sound like a very nice thing to say about Jesus. Maybe it was like saying: Look, dead man walking.

DAVE BAST

But certainly, John wants to draw that out...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

Because at the end of his Gospel, he specifies very clearly that Jesus dies on the cross at the very hour that the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple in preparation for the feast. So, it is there in the Gospel of John...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But it is also in the book of Revelation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; where, you know, I mean, you get Jesus as both lamb and lion. He is the Lamb of God and he is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is a lamb, but there is a fierceness to him. In fact, we had Neal Plantinga as a guest earlier in this series. He had a wonderful sermon years ago called the wrath of the Lamb. Now, we do not think of a lamb having wrath, but listen to these passages.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; well, the wrath of the Lamb is a phrase from Revelation* Chapter 6, at the very end of the chapter...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Where people, when Christ returns they are going to say to the hills: Cover us; and to the mountains: Fall on us. Save us from the wrath of the Lamb; which is amazing; or this from Revelation 5, where John has a vision of Jesus in heaven.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁶Then I saw a Lamb looking as though it had been slain standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne; ⁸and when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. So, he is a lamb, which again, go to Google Images and type in gentle; you will see lots of pictures of awfully cute, curly-haired lambs...

DAVE BAST

Especially around Easter time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but here is a Lamb that has all of these horns and eyes and who is powerful enough that the elders fall down in awe before him.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely, yes; and in fact, in the book of Revelation...this is why you do not want to try to draw the pictures in Revelation...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Because they are highly symbolic, and you cannot always put it to... How would you put seven horns on the head of a lamb?

SCOTT HOEZEE

With seven eyes to boot.

DAVE BAST

Right; but the point is not that this is some grotesque creature. The point...in the Bible in general, a horn is a symbol of strength.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Seven, for John, is the number of completeness or fullness, so this is the *omnipotent* Lamb. He is all powerful—all powerful Lamb; again, kind of a contradiction—kind of a paradox.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In fact, you get to Revelation Chapter 17, and we read: ¹⁴They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers.

The Lamb, who is the Lord and the King.

DAVE BAST

So, he is a lamb with some oomph, isn't he?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Not just meek and bleating and gentle—that is bleating with a T, not bleeding...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, although both of those...

DAVE BAST

Both, yes; he is sacrificed as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But so, Jesus has all this power, but as Stephen Winward...who years ago wrote a really nice book on the fruit of the Spirit...Stephen Winward pointed out one time that, you know, Jesus does have all that power, but look how he channeled it; look what he did with it. He did not defeat evil by plowing it under or by meeting it with brute force. He died by letting evil enter him. Jesus absorbed all the punishment for sin. Jesus absorbed every bad thing that has happened in history. Jesus took into himself every ongoing cycle of violence and revenge and ended it once for all by dying; and it was by that gentle dying as the Lamb slain—the Lamb looking like it had been slain, John said...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is what finally brought salvation. So, he is all powerful...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the only reason he can finally defeat it all, but he does it in a gentle way.

DAVE BAST

He does; and you know, Scott, I was...recently I preached on the story of Pontius Pilate, and the trial scene in John Chapters 18 and 19; this profound, powerful, at times mystifying interaction that Pilate has with Jesus; almost as if Jesus is giving Pilate a chance to see what he is doing and maybe stop; but in the course of that, you know, Pilate is kind of: What are you, a king? What is going on here? Tell me, I am kind of bewildered by all of this. Why are they so mad at you? And Jesus says to him: My kingdom is not of this world; which, if you stop and think about and unpack that, yes, he is a king, but not the way Pilate thinks; not in Pilate's sense of the word; not in the worldly sense of generals and armies and flags and missiles, and we are going to crush our enemies. His kingdom is different; his kingdom has different rules; his kingdom has different values; and he operates in a gentle way that yet brings power to bear and overthrows evil from within by surrendering to it, essentially...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And allowing evil to do its worst, and yet God, out of that, brings salvation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And historically...we know something historically, but also, if we are honest about the people of God and the Church of God in this present moment, historically most of us in the Church have had a hard time remembering that that is how we are supposed to operate. We are always tempted to flex worldly power...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To bulldoze people into morality...

DAVE BAST

Use the weapons and methods of the kingdoms of this world rather than of Jesus' kingdom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but we are called to go another way, and how and why we are going to do that is something we will take up to close out the program in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are just wrapping up now one of the last of our programs on the fruit of the Spirit, the beautiful quality of gentleness, which we see displayed in Jesus; a gentleness that also has a strength to it; and let's go right to a well-known passage from I Peter 3, where we read this:

¹⁵But in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect; ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A wonderful passage, which establishes what different people, but Richard Mouw has written quite a bit over the years about something he labels "public civility" for Christians; and we were saying at the end of the last segment, Dave, that Jesus proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that you can be gentle, like a lamb, and yet accomplish all salvation through great power; but we in the Church are so often tempted to leapfrog gentleness and just go for the power and strong-arm people into believing; and certainly, you know, in Church history we have tried to bully people into being Christians at the tip of a sword...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have threatened people's lives: Convert or else.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It doesn't work that way; and here Peter is talking to people in the 1st Century. Christianity is still a new thing—a new religion. People are going to ask questions: How come you've got this hope? What is this Gospel thing? Tell me about it. Maybe sometimes the questions were a little barbed or sometimes they were a little hostile; and Peter says: Always answer them...answer them gently and respectfully. Ultimately we know that Peter is saying because that is how you are going to look the most like Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, sort of rules for public civility, as you mentioned, Rich Mouw's wonderful book. He wrote another one called, I think, *Uncommon Decency*...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And that is the way we ought to engage in conversations; even in conflicts with... The old saying: Can you disagree without being disagreeable? Can we stand for what we believe in? You know, we are not supposed to roll over. Peter says you have to be able to give a reason for the hope that you have; which, interestingly,

indicates that maybe the first thing people engage us with is because they see something in us that they wish they had—they see something positive—they see something hopeful—they see something joyful. We said in another program way back at the start of this series that joy is related to hope. So, maybe they see our joy and they ask us about it, and then we give a reason, but we do it gently. We do not, you know, sort of attack with the world's methods. We do not get into shouting matches. We do not get into cutting and to scoring points by mocking other people, but we do what we do. We stand our ground; we are firm, but gently and with respect.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And this is Peter writing this, the passage we just read from I Peter 3, and he probably learned this the hard way, because Peter is the one, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Gospels tell us, who thought that he would do his best work for Jesus by whipping out a sword and cutting off a high priest's servant's ear; and Jesus said: No, no, no, no. Put your sword away. He healed the person's ear. So Peter now is saying: Look, gentleness is the way. (He does not say this here, but he could as well have said: Believe me, I know what I am talking about here. I have tried to go the other way—the Roman way—the worldly, bare your sword way—it does not work. You do not look or sound like Jesus when you do that.)

DAVE BAST

Remember: My kingdom is not of this world. We need to come back to that again and again and again. So, do not use worldly methods, do not use, necessarily worldly arguments or worldly strong-arm tactics to make your point, because it does not work; it just spoils things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Even, as Peter says, even if it means that you get slapped around a bit. You know, better to suffer for doing good than doing evil. The thing...you mentioned this a minute ago, Dave...this is where we get at that combination of gentleness and strength we talked about; how Jesus is both the Lamb of God and the Lion of the tribe of Judah: Lamb—Lion; gentleness—strength. Peter is saying stand up for your faith. You know, gentleness does not mean just saying aw, shucks all the time or looking down at your feet or somebody saying: Why do you believe in Jesus? Aw, never mind. I am gentle, so I don't want to talk about it. No; Peter is saying, make a stand, but be gentle about it; and in that gentleness is the strength of Jesus to help you stand up, even to abuse. Maybe even sometimes you are right to get angry about a certain situation in life, but how you rebuke the people involved in that also has to be Jesus-like, which means with great strength and integrity, but in gentleness to point them to the better things of God.

DAVE BAST

Yes; we do not have to be Casper Milktoast. So vanilla...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Namby pamby.

DAVE BAST

So bland; so namby pamby...they are shrinking all the time. No; we can be forthright. We need to be forthright as witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ; but part of our witness has to be reflecting his character. Again, I go back to the trial of Jesus and the passion of Jesus; how he stood there and he took it. He took the mocking. Can you imagine this, as we read in the Gospels, the soldiers...they whip him; they put a crown of thorns on his head; they slap him around; they put a purple robe and a stick in his hand and they fall down in mock worship and call him a king; and he just stands there and takes it. He does not retaliate; he does not lash... I mean, he could have snapped his finger and blasted them all...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But that gentleness...boy, that takes strength; that takes restraint.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As well as once he got on the cross, and then he forgave all those people...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we also know that one of the reasons, among the many reasons gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit, is it is a precondition to forgive people. They have hurt you; they maybe have *really* hurt you. It is a genuine wrong. You do not have to forgive the things that are genuinely wrong. Forgiveness is letting go of an anger you have a right to, but you are going to be gentle with this person. He is broken, same as me. I have hurt people, same as he hurt me. I wanted to be treated gently and forgiven when I was the evildoer—when I messed up, so that is what I am going to do for this other person.

DAVE BAST

So, it is a fruit of the Spirit...gentleness; and it is tender; it is soothing; it is lamb-like; but that does not mean it is not strong and firm. It is one of the greatest of all strengths after all, and it worked for Jesus, didn't it? It can work for you and me, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we wrap up this series by talking about the spiritual fruit of self-control, and why that is a mark of a Christian in step with the Holy Spirit.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know what scripture passages or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

***Correction:** The audio of this program misstates the reference for the phrase “the wrath of the Lamb” as John chapter 6. The correct reference is Revelation 6; whose author is John.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/the-fruit-of-gentleness>

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