

## **Let Your Gentleness be Evident to All**

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the church in Philippi, *let your gentleness be evident to all*. This is what he wanted these Christians to be like.

They were to be marked with gentleness.

Today we look at the eighth Fruit of the Spirit which is Gentleness, and without a shadow of a doubt, this is one of the loveliest of the fruits. If you can have a favourite this would be mine.

When we think of gentleness, we may immediately think of weakness, but true gentleness is a great strength.

Gentleness has been described as graciousness, considerateness, humility, calmness and putting others first. This is as close to the Greek word as we can get.

Some of the most beautiful stories ever told have been about gentleness and they usually involve a giant. There is Oscar Wilde's story of the selfish giant, who was transformed by the actions of a little boy. The Selfish Giant was changed when a little boy touched his heart and when this selfish giant looked at the little boy's hands, he saw the nail marks on his hands. At that moment his heart was changed and he became gentle and kind and opened his garden to all the children in the town, and welcomed them to come and play in his garden. When he did, his garden turned from winter into summer.

Then there is Roald Dahl's story of the BFG – the Big Friendly Giant who shows great gentleness. He was a gentle giant who captured dreams and kept them in bottles for children to enjoy while they were asleep.

What is your definition of gentleness?

Is it something that you hold in high regard?

Well, it is a Fruit of the Spirit for a reason, and the reason is this...that Jesus was gentle.

When we come to the Scriptures and we read the Gospels of Jesus, his life was marked by gentleness. He wasn't a push-over but he had a gentle spirit.

Here is Matthew's definition of the gentleness of Jesus...

**Matthew 12:15** Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. <sup>16</sup>He warned them not to tell others about him. <sup>17</sup>This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>18</sup>“Here is my servant whom I have chosen,  
the one I love, in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

<sup>19</sup>He will not quarrel or cry out;  
no one will hear his voice in the streets.

<sup>20</sup>A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out,  
till he has brought justice through to victory.

<sup>21</sup>In his name the nations will put their hope.”

What is a bruised reed?

To the world, a bruised reed is a worthless thing. It has no power, no stability, no purpose. It is good for nothing but to be cut down and discarded. So, in the world there are many bruised people, individuals who have been wounded emotionally, spiritually, or physically. They are feeble, and to most of the world, they are dispensable. But not to God. The prophecy that Jesus fulfilled is that the bruised reed He would not break. It's a prophecy that speaks of Christ's tender, compassionate care for the weak and downtrodden.

It is a picture of gentleness.

*A smouldering wick he will not snuff out.*

Jesus is gentle in the way that he brings about his purposes.

The disfigured man whom Jesus met in [Matthew 12](#) was a “bruised reed,” and Jesus gave him strength and cured his shrivelled hand. The woman taken in adultery was a “bruised reed” in [John 8](#), and Jesus saved her from stoning and forgave her sin. Jairus was a “bruised reed” as he mourned his

daughter's death, but Jesus strengthened his faith and raised his daughter from the dead. The woman with the issue of blood in [Luke 8](#) was a "bruised reed," and Jesus restored her to full health. The disciple Peter was a "bruised reed" – he was almost snuffed out - after his denial of the Lord, but Jesus gently and lovingly renewed him to fellowship after the resurrection. Over and over in the Gospels, we see Jesus caring for the "bruised reeds" of the world.

Jesus understands the bruised reed. For he was "bruised for our iniquities" ([Isaiah 53:5, NKJV](#)). In other words, He was bruised on behalf of those bruised by sin. Those who come to Christ He will not despise. They have this promise from Jesus: "*[God] has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted*" ([Isaiah 61:1](#)).

You may be a "bruised reed" in some way today. You may feel like a wick almost snuffed out; you may feel pressed down with the troubles of this world. You may be struggling with doubt and fear. You may be feeble and disheartened and ready to break.

But know this: Jesus cares. He will have pity for the broken-hearted, compassion for the humble, affection for the penitent, and healing for the afflicted. Come to Him in faith, humbly trusting His strength, and find that He is gentle and gracious to all.

So today, we are thinking about gentleness and with all the other qualities we quickly realise that this speaks of God.

Almighty God is like that gentle giant, who has come to earth to be with us and to teach us and to die for us and to open the gates of eternal life.

The Almighty God is a gentle spirit, and this is demonstrated in the life of his son Jesus.

Today I want us to focus especially on our reading from Luke's gospel of the Emmaus Road experience and of Jesus walking seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus with two dispirited, broken hearted disciples.

Picture the scene, it's evening and the sun is setting, and they have a seven mile walk into the sunset from Emmaus, and they have just witnessed the cruelest of deaths. They have witnessed their Lord crucified between two criminals on a cross.

They have witnessed the Roman nails piercing their Lord's hands and a Roman sword plunged into his side.

Their hearts are broken and life makes no sense.

They had hoped that Jesus was the salvation of Israel, that he was bringing the Kingdom of God into this world but now that dream has been torn asunder and there is little to cling on to. Their heads are down, looking to the ground, and nothing makes sense any more.

But into their moment of gloom, there walks a stranger. They do not recognise the stranger, perhaps their heads are bowed so low that they don't really want to speak or share in conversation. Their grief has blinded them.

But this stranger walks with them on their journey, and as he does, he asks questions. I can imagine his gentle spirit as he graciously opens the hearts of those two disciples. He asks them, *"What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"*

It's a great question, that opens up a response for the disciples.

It's counselling at its best, ask the right question, don't give the answer, but ask and listen and so they respond. You must be the only person in Jerusalem that hasn't heard all the things that have happened there in the last few days.

They are amazed at this stranger not knowing what has happened.

Jesus is so gentle in spirit, that they don't even make a connection, with this stranger and the cross.

Jesus said in another place, **Matthew 11:28** "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus understands us and therefore God understands our pain.

God comes to us in a whole host of different ways, he came to Elijah the prophet, not in the earthquake, nor the fire, but in a gentle whisper.

Isn't that beautiful that God works in this mysterious way that he chooses to come to us, gentle in spirit. He comes to bind the broken hearted. He comes to the bruised reed and the candle that is burning low.

Last week I listened to the whole Gospel of Luke, it was a wonderful experience, just walking and listening on the Campsies, a great way to spend the early hours of a Monday morning and hear the whole story. So often we only hear snippets, stories, chapters and we don't get the big picture but as I listened carefully, asking the question, who is this Jesus?

You see, that's why Luke's Gospel was written, it was written to tell an accurate story of Jesus and as I came near the end, I thought what one story sums up Jesus.

So many: Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, Calling of Zacchaeus, Widow's Mite, but when I came to the Emmaus story, near the end of the Gospel. I realised that this is the picture of the Jesus that I have come to know over the years. A Jesus that is gentle in spirit – a Jesus who listens and who helps and who cares and who brings people to faith.

For this encounter by those two people on the Emmaus road is a story of transformation.

Before Christ met them, they were downcast, they were dejected, and were depressed, and when Christ leaves them, they are joyful, positive and full of hope. The encounter of the gentle Jesus moves them to action. They now leave their home and race back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples that Jesus is alive.

If there were records for running the 7 miles...they would have broken them. The journey to Emmaus was long and difficult, the journey to Jerusalem was short and exciting.

Now there are two things that I would like you to apply to your lives this morning.

Firstly, Is Jesus walking with you?

The Guild theme is *going the extra mile*, it implies walking that extra mile with someone else but before we can do that extra mile, we need strength, we need stamina, we need resilience. Going the extra mile takes hard work, dedication and enthusiasm.

It's hard enough getting through life without going extra miles, and yet that is what Jesus is telling his hearers: *go the extra mile*. **Matthew 5:41**, "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you".

These are hard things to do.

So, going the extra mile is symbolic of doing something for someone else that will cost you. We can only do this when we ourselves are fit and strong and spiritually alive, otherwise we would have no inclination to go the extra mile.

If we are like the people on the Emmaus road and we have lost hope and purpose and feel dejected and our spirits are down, it's very hard for us to go the extra mile. But when we know God, and we meet with God on the road, we find that God is walking the extra mile with us, that He is walking seven extra miles, to bring us hope and love and grace.

When we encounter the God of the extra mile: the God who left heaven to come to earth, the God who went the extra mile of the cross, to take our sin and shame upon him...

When we encounter the God of the extra mile of the resurrection: that he came back after death and rose triumphantly and that same God in Jesus is walking beside grieving disciples, for no other reason than to bring them to faith...

When we encounter the God of the extra mile: the God who spoke and all things came in to being. The God who has lavishly given us all things. When we meet with this God and realise that he loves me and you as if were the only person in the world...

When we encounter his grace and mercy and see that he is indeed the God of the extra mile. Then like the men on the Emmaus road, we will say, *didn't our hearts burn within us when he spoke to us on the road?* When we look back and see that he has walked with us through our times of trial and fear and depression, we then see that a strange fire was burning in our souls.

The God of the extra mile fills us with that same spirit and gives us the resilience and the endurance to turn and run back to our brethren and to those in need, to tell them that the God of the extra mile is with us.

Secondly, when the fire is lit in our hearts, when we have experienced his spirit, the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, then we will want to share these fruits with others.

We are compelled to go the extra mile, to become Jesus for others, and in the Guild pack for this year, they have suggestions on how we become the extra mile people.

- Befriend someone who is lonely or isolated.
- Help those who are homeless perhaps by giving financially or by volunteering in a local homeless shelter.
- Feed those who are hungry by offering a special meal for vulnerable people in your community.
- Speak out wherever you see injustice and give a voice to the voiceless.

The Guild National Vice Convenor writes, "Jesus wants us to be giving, loving, forgiving, gentle, going the extra mile. Do something above and beyond, something unexpected...in a good way. Jesus said *whenever you have done it for the least, you have done it to me.*"

So, the penultimate fruit is Gentleness and it's a lovely fruit. We all love gentle people, people whose hearts are at peace.

But gentleness can also be discovered in the storm. When times are rough and there are many issues, gentleness can be encountered.

In the midst of a storm we find Christ bringing peace to the hearts of the disciples as he calms the storm. In the midst of a storm, we can discover a crevice in the rock, a place of shelter, where the storm will blow around us but, in the crevice, we are protected and safe, and that is a place of gentleness. That is why the hymn, Rock of Ages was composed, as the hymn writer found himself in a storm and he found God's gentleness and peace,

That is what the church is about, a sanctuary, a place of refuge, a place where people can meet with the gentle spirit of Jesus.

Today friends, may you receive the extra mile spirit of Jesus.

May you let his gentle spirit come into your lives and allow it to transform you, and to bring you peace, and when you have that spirit, go and share the extra mile with someone who needs you. Not from an exalted position, but from a humble, gentle place, and then they too may come to meet with the spirit of Christ in their lives.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.