

Fruits of the Holy Spirit – Session 9

Gentleness

Galatians 5

Timing: 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed; pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker: If you were a gentle animal which animal would you be and why?

Introduction

Key Point: Our lives get better and better as we give our lives over to the Holy Spirit

Key Verse: “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*” (Galatians 5: 22-23).

Introduce this week on *gentleness*

Key Point: God grows the fruit of gentleness in us

Key Verse: “*The fruit of the Spirit is...gentleness*” (Galatians 5:23)

Share a short example of God growing the fruit of gentleness in your own life, i.e. “I used to struggle with being easily angered/harsh/cruel, I remember once I...” The story doesn’t have to be amusing or dramatic (although both are good), just personal.

Turn to your neighbour and describe the most gentle person you know. Why do you think that gentleness is important? Do you consider gentleness a strength or weakness?

Quote some example statistics of violence in our society (just Google it). Part of the anecdote to that is gentleness. It’s not weakness. It’s not feminine. It’s not for the timid or those averse to confrontation. Recast a vision for this fruit.

1. Gentleness is Strength

The Point: Gentleness is the godly way to deploy power

“Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength”. Saint Francis de Sales
“I learned that it is the weak who are cruel, and that gentleness is to be expected only from the strong”. Leo Rosten

God is strong, but he is also gentle. See 1 Kings 19:9-13

- The presence of the Lord passes by Elijah
- Preceding God, there is a great and powerful wind, an earthquake and fire, but “the Lord was not in” any of those. (v.11-12a)
- Then “after the fire came a gentle whisper” (v12b) and God was in that.

Gentleness is a core attribute of God. His glory is most fully revealed not in his terrifying power, but in a whisper. It is an image of total authority and power that doesn’t shout and demand attention, but invites us to lean close and listen.

Jesus also deploys total authority and power in this mode of gentleness (2 Corinthians 10:1). This is most clearly seen in his refusal to resist arrest, but voluntarily offer himself for us (see Matthew 26:47-56)

Illustration: If there is a teacher or a policeman in the group, ask them to testify that consistently shouting or resorting to obvious demonstrations of force or power are a sign of losing control and authority, of weakness. The strongest teachers and law enforcers rarely have to use forceful methods as their authority is evident in more gentle means.

Application: Invite people to note down areas in their lives where they find themselves consistently resorting to positional power or even physical force.

Turn to your neighbour and share those areas with one another and briefly pray for each other that God would grow the fruit of gentleness – actually a symptom of more authoritative power in the situation!

2. Gentleness is good for us

The Point: Becoming gentler makes us more beautiful and happier

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment... Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.” (1 Peter 3:3-4)

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... for I am gentle... and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

3. Gentleness Wins People

The Point: Our objective is never to win arguments, but to win people.

Consider the following scriptures:

- Philippians 4:5 “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”
- 1 Peter 3:15 “Always be prepared to give an answer... with gentleness and respect.”

These two are about how much we are to value the dignity of every individual, especially as we share the gospel with them in word or action, and pray for them.

1 Thessalonians 2:3-7 and Proverbs 25:15b warn us against using gentleness in an insincere and manipulative way.

Proverbs 15:1 says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” In other words, our gentleness can diffuse confrontational situations that could easily escalate. Our gentleness can relax others and invite them to open up, where ungente responses just drive people into defensive or hostile postures that are then much harder to address.

Illustration: Share a personal story of failure, then a story of success, in this area of practical discipleship.

Application: Just try it! Commit to being deliberately gentle tomorrow, with your spouse, family, works colleagues, children, boss, suppliers or customers...and see what the result is. Agree with a friend to talk about it in a few days time.

Ministry

- All stand. Lead a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come and reveal a greater sense of Christ's gentleness. Ask him to correct our false perceptions (e.g. gentleness = weakness, feminine)
- Allow some time in silence for words or pictures of what God might be saying, having thought whether they are consistent with the scriptures mentioned
- Break into 3's to pray for one another. 1) That God would fill us with his Holy Spirit to grow this fruit in us. 2) For others around us who might have been affected by our former lack of gentleness. 3) For others around us who might be won over to Christ through our gentleness.