

Blueprint: A Gentle Man  
Quest  
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Today we're covering the qualification of being gentle. In 1 Timothy 3:3, Paul says that leaders within the church should be "not violent but gentle." In Titus 3:2, the directive is the same, but the audience is broader. This time, Paul says that all Christians have an obligation to be gentle.

It's interesting, because I believe most men want to be a gentleman, but not all men want to be a gentle man. We want to be known as a man who is polite, says please and thank you, opens doors for women, and is respectful to elders and peers. It's an honor to be called a gentleman, but it might not seem as honorable to be called a gentle man.

The concept of being a gentleman emerged in the Middle Ages as a designation for a chivalrous man of good family. Therefore, being a "gentleman" is foreign to the New Testament. This will not be a lecture about proper codes of conduct for a gentleman, which side of the sidewalk to walk on, when to offer your coat to a woman, or when it is appropriate to ask a lady if she is pregnant (the answer is never). But time after time, all throughout the Bible, men are called to be gentle.

In the New Testament, there are two primary words used to describe a person who is gentle. One word is the one used by Paul in 1 Timothy and Titus, and the other is usually translated as "meekness." While the meanings of these two Greek words slightly differ, Paul uses both words consecutively to describe Jesus in 2 Corinthians 10:1, noting the, "meekness and gentleness" of Christ, using both Greek words. Therefore, for the sake of this lecture, I will use both concepts interchangeably.

I also hope to redeem the idea of being gentle. In our fast paced, market driven world, meekness and gentleness are not generally viewed with high regard. We want to be tough, we want to be relentless, we want what we want, we want it now, and we will often bulldoze over those who stand in our way.

But the call of the Christian man is higher. The call is to emulate Christ, the gentle Savior. And to understand how to be like Christ in this way, we have to first discover what being gentle does not mean.

First, Gentleness is not Weakness.

A common modern definition of meekness or gentleness today is "deficient in spirit and courage." We think of a gentle breeze, a gentle mother, a gentle nudge, as something that is the opposite of strong. But in the context of the New Testament, nothing could be further from the truth.

Instead, the Biblical concept of meekness is strength under control. The common image given here is that of a wild stallion. A horse is strong, can gallop fast, and leap tall structures. If a man wants to tame a wild horse, it takes time and effort. It takes meticulous training for the horse to come under the authority of his master. Once the horse is tame, the horse is meek. Did the horse lose any strength in the process? Absolutely not. Can the horse now use his strength in more effective and controlled ways? Absolutely. This is what meekness, gentleness is all about. It's having strength, courage, bravery, but using them under control of our Master.

After all, remember that Jesus was often described as being gentle and meek. This is the same Jesus who was a carpenter, a blue collar physical laborer. Physically, He was far from weak. He even showed his strength in Matthew 11 when He "entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons." Now, Jesus did not flip tables any time He saw sinful action. If so, the Gospels would be nothing more than a Table-Flipping tale. Instead, Jesus uses His strength, under control, to stand for what was important to Him. This is meekness. This is gentleness.

In fact, violence is weaker than gentleness. Violence and bullying are simply mechanisms of overcompensation. Bullies are not comfortable in their own skin, so instead of trying to elevate themselves, they push down others. This is weakness.

The late Methodist Pastor Ralph W. Sockman said this, "Nothing is so strong as gentleness. Nothing is so gentle as real strength." Meekness is not weakness.

### Second, Gentleness does not mean being a pushover.

In the same breath that Paul instructs elders of the church to be gentle in 1 Timothy, he says that the Cretans, the inhabitants of a nearby Mediterranean island, are, "detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." Paul was not afraid to speak strongly for what he believed in. He was not willing to sacrifice his integrity, sacrifice what he knew was right, in order to win friends and influence people. He was not a pushover.

Jonathan Edwards, a Puritan Pastor and leader of the First Great Awakening in the New World, called gentleness "the Christian Spirit." He said, "All who are truly godly and are real disciples of Christ have a gentle spirit in them." This might sound odd coming from a man who preached the famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," calling out the people in explicit terms for their sins. Edwards was not a pushover. He was a gentle man, but he was not willing to allow his hearers to continue in their sin and destruction.

Being gentle does not mean abandoning all the hills you will die on. Instead, it means carefully picking those hills and standing firm on them. Not everything is worth fighting for, but for the things that matter, gentle men will not be pushovers.

So if that's what being gentle does not mean, what does it mean?

### A. Being Gentle Means Being Reasonable.

Paul uses the same word translated as “gentleness” in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus in Philippians 4:5: “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.” As we just mentioned, a gentle person can pick and choose their battles wisely. They know when something is worth a fight, and they know when to let something go.

The true historical meaning of gentleness or reasonableness means being fair by relaxing overly strict commands in order to keep the “spirit of the law.” In times before the New Testament, this word expressed “moderation which recognizes the impossibility that cleaves to formal law.” In other words, a gentle person, a reasonable person will understand that sometimes the formal law and God’s Law come into tension. When that happens, the gentle person will always choose God’s Law.

Something that is legally right can be morally wrong. It is legal to cheat on your wife. That does not make it moral. It is legal to become addicted to alcohol. That does not make it moral. It is legal to waste your life playing video games, but that does not make it moral. A reasonable person is able to discern between the two and make a proper moral judgment on himself and on others.

When we are reasonable in this way, we show the character of God our Father. God is not unreasonable about His Laws. The Laws that He has given us, commanded us to abide by, and etched in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. If God demanded strict adherence to His Law, we would be struck dead every time we lied, a lightning bolt would come from heaven each time we lusted, and we would be eternally separated from Him.

But God sent Jesus, reasonableness embodied, to forgive us of our sins. God knows you will sin. God knows I will sin. But by Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross, God treats us reasonably, expecting us to still obey His Commands, but forgiving us when, not if, we do not.

### B. Being Gentle Means Being Wise

The word “wisdom” appears in the Bible some 367 times. We’re told in Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” In Ephesians 5:15-16, Paul writes, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of time, because the days are evil.” In James 3:17, we are reminded that to be wise is to be gentle: “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”

To exemplify gentleness requires wisdom, particularly the wisdom of God and yourself. A wise man recognizes that the more power he has, the more gentleness is required. I’ve heard it described this way: I could ask my four year old daughter to squeeze my hand as hard as she wanted to. I could tell her to try and hurt me, and for some reason, seeing daddy in pain is

funny to my children, so she would jump at this opportunity. She could squeeze and squeeze and never leave a mark, because she does not have the power to do so. She does not have much power, so she does not have to try to be as gentle. On the other hand, I could easily hurt her hand by squeezing it. When we cross the street together, I have to be careful to be gentle, because my power could hurt her.

Recognize how much power you have in your workplace, in your family, even in your church. Absolute power corrupts absolutely, but it also demands a special attention to gentleness. Being wise about your lot in life and being a good steward of the power that has been given to you is a way you can be a gentle man.

### C. Being Gentle means Being Angry at the Right Time

Now, at some level, being gentle and being angry might seem like polar opposites. As the late Jesuit Priest John A. Hardon says, "Gentleness is the virtue that restrains the passion of anger." Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 3 to not become violent, but to be gentle. Gentleness does indeed restrain passionate anger and prevents us from becoming violent, but a gentle man still knows that there are times to be angry.

A famous passage from Ecclesiastes 3 reminds us that there is a time for everything under the sun: "A time to kill, and a time to heal...a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing...a time to tear, and a time to sew...a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace." The Teacher poetically states that life is best lived in between two extremes, knowing when to exercise anger, and when to exercise peace.

Aristotle said that this was the secret to a person who is truly composed. He said that the man who is gentle and meek is the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time. A tame horse knows when it's time to use his strength at the behest of the master. He knows when it is time gallop and when it's time to jump.

I'd encourage you to take some time to think about the last time you got truly angry. The last time you threw something, raised your voice, felt your blood pressure rise. Were you angry at your children for disobeying? Were you angry at your wife for burning supper? Were you angry at the Astros for losing? Then, ask yourself, was this the right time to be angry? A helpful tool I've learned to evaluate whether or not anger is justified is the 5x5 rule. If it's not gonna matter in 5 years, don't spend more than 5 minutes being angry about it.

But, remember, anger does not justify violence. In fact, violence often has the opposite effect. You've heard it said before that you catch more flies with honey. The political philosopher John Locke once said, "Gentleness is far more successful in all its enterprises than violence; indeed, violence generally frustrates its own purpose, while gentleness scarcely ever fails."

Finally, according to Scripture:

#### D. Being Gentle Means Being Blessed.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' most famous sermon, he said "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Jesus is simply building on earlier Scriptural precedence. We're told that God will hear the desire of the meek in Psalm 10:17. In Psalm 37:11, we hear that the meek will inherit the land. Isaiah 11:4 says that the Messiah will give equity to the meek. And in Isaiah 29:19, we learn that the meek will obtain the fresh joy of the Lord.

Therefore, according to Scripture, the blessed life is not one of large homes and fancy cars; it's a life of humility, a life of meekness, a life of gentleness. If you want to live a happy, joyful, good life, being gentle is one of the keys.

My grandfather was, to me, the epitome of a gentle and blessed man. His first wife died in a horrific car accident soon after my uncle was born. Papaw was left a single father in his mid-twenties. He finished his college degree, obtained his Master's from Asbury Theological Seminary, met my grandmother, and enlisted as a chaplain in the Air Force. He deployed multiple times, ministering to young men returning from battles. He eventually received the rank of Colonel before retiring and serving a small United Methodist Church in Tuscola, Texas for 20 years. Papaw was small in stature, but a giant in the faith. I never saw him angry, I never saw him raise his voice. He had a quiet strength; when he spoke, people listened. He never made millions, his name is not adorned on any hallways, he never wrote books or served a large church. But he knew that he was blessed, and all those who knew him were blessed by his gentle spirit.

I know Rob has told you before that he may one day do your funeral, and that you should give him some good material so he doesn't have to lie about you. I don't know about you, but I would love the adjective "gentle" to make its way into the eulogy at my funeral. So how can we live a gentle life? What does it look like on the ground level?

#### First, let's talk about what it means to be gentle in the workplace.

Ecclesiastes 10:4 says, "If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great offenses to rest." I heard one preacher say that when you read the Old Testament and see the word "ruler," you can replace that for "boss." So when your boss's anger rises against you, Ecclesiastes tells us to remain calm, and lay that offense to rest. What would it look like in your career to respond to anger with gentleness and civility? You might be afraid that you would be seen as weak, but I would suggest that is not the case.

Neurologists now say that we have mirror neurons in our brain. That's why when someone else gets angry and raises their voice, we naturally do the same. If someone is calm and subdued, we also become calm and subdued. But, the opposite is true. Because your boss's brain also has mirror neurons, you can control the room through your gentleness. If you want your office to be a place of joy and gentleness, start by being joyful and gentle. It's just that simple.

And what you'll find is that your gentleness will be attractive. It will be attractive to your superiors, to your direct reports, and even to your customers. You don't attract what you want to attract; you attract who you are. No one likes an overbearing and pushy salesman.

In your workplace, also remember that being gentle means abiding by God's Laws over and above the laws of the land or the laws of the workplace. It means being a man of integrity. This past weekend I ran into an old friend in College Station. He's a very successful and personable man, and had been with the same nationwide company for 12 years. He rubbed shoulders with very successful athletes and loved his work. I asked how the job was going for him, and he told me that he had resigned earlier in the week. He said after new management, he was asked to do something that wasn't necessarily illegal, but he knew it would jeopardize his integrity. He said no, and walked away. That's being gentle. That's keeping your integrity in the workplace, that's knowing a line and refusing to cross it.

Last thing I'll say about being gentle in the workplace: Don't ever get too big for your britches. There's a story of George Washington, and whether it's true or whether it's apocryphal, I don't know. But it's said that Washington was once on a fox hunting expedition with a group of friends. They were passing through a field that was bordered by a stone wall. As his horse jumped the wall, it accidentally kicked off a stone. Washington immediately stopped his horse, got down, and replaced the stone. His friends were aghast. After all, this was a great war general and the President of the newly formed nation. One friend said, "You are too big a man to bother with that." Washington, placing the stone back in place, gently replied, "No, I am just the right size."

So, ask yourself: How do I treat my coworkers? Am I patient with them or demanding all the time? Do I treat them with respect, or do I treat them with abruptness, like my time is much more valuable than theirs? Am I willing to go the extra mile, to do something that is not explicitly on my job description, to help others? Am I gentle?

In your home, you must also be gentle.

I've only been a parent for four years, but I'm learning this lesson rather quickly: Screaming at your children rarely, if ever, works. I'm at the stage where I can strike the fear of God into my children, for better or for worse. I can use my dad voice to command them to get down from there or eat your chicken or get that out of your mouth. And that non-gentle dad voice was becoming more and more prevalent. One of the worst moments in my parenting happened after one of these spells. I was tasked with putting our oldest to bed, and as I went to pick her up, she ran from me and into her mother's arms in tears. She said, "I don't want Dad to take me up. He's a monster." Talk about twisting the knife.

With your children, gentleness will speak louder than a raised voice ever could. I once got in trouble at school (yes, once, I was actually a great kid). I thought Mrs. Fellers, the head gym teacher, was particularly strict and unreasonable. My friend Reagan and I noticed that she

parked her car outside the gymnasium, and decided it was a good idea to give the car a little kick. Nothing too strong, we didn't dent the thing, but just enough to take out some anger. My buddy Reagan made the mistake of kicking it with the bottom of his shoe, which on a dirty white minivan, left a distinguishable mark. Our parents were called and we were sent to In School Suspension for the day. I remember on the bus ride home, I was terrified for my dad to get home from work. He was not an angry man, rarely raised his voice, and was not at all violent, but I had never gotten in trouble like this before. He came home from work, I hid in my room. We ate dinner, mentioned nothing of the incident, and then after ice cream, he invited me to come back to his study. He sat me down on his couch, looked me in the eyes, and gently asked the question, "So why'd you do it?" We talked through my mistake, he told me his was disappointed in me, and those words pierced so much more than any screaming or yelling ever could have. It was his gentle spirit that deterred me from ever doing something so foolish ever again.

Let me challenge you a bit here: You may think that you're being gentle with your spouse and with your children, but it doesn't really matter what you think; it matters what they perceive. Perception is reality. So, does your wife think you are gentle? I took the liberty of asking Terry Loughridge to email each of your wives to let us know whether or not you are gentle. And as a way of holding you accountable in Christian brotherly love, I will now read the names of those of you who failed the test (kidding). But if you had a tinge of fear right there, maybe you need to be more gentle at home.

John Gottman, the world-renowned marriage and family expert, said you need 5 positive interactions to cancel out every 1 negative interaction. That means that even if you're gentle 80% of the time, your family might not perceive you as such.

So ask yourself: How do I treat my family? Am I patient with them or demanding all the time? Do I respect their wants and likes, or do I force my own way? Am I considerate of my family in my home? Am I gentle with my spouse and children?

Finally, let's talk about how to be gentle in your community.

Everywhere you go: on the roads, in the bleachers of a football game, at restaurants, in the grocery store, you are a representative of Christ and of your church. That means that the way you tip matters. The way you treat the cart boy at the golf course matters. The way you drive in 5 o'clock traffic matters. If you want to be described as a gentle man, you must be consistent in all your ways.

Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Do not be a man who intentionally tries to stir up anger. Instead, attempt to lower the temperature of the room, knowing that you are a representative of Christ. Part of knowing what hills you will die on is knowing when winning argument is not worth losing a relationship. Being gentle means that you will sometimes need to end a heated discussion because you realize both parties are simply digging in their heels more. I'm all for productive debates, but

when they run the risk of one party losing respect for the other because of an opinion they hold, it's not worth it. Be the bigger man, be the gentle man, and suggest agreeing to disagree, and move on.

An old Indian Proverb says, "The way to overcome the angry person is with gentleness, the evil person with goodness, the miser with generosity, and the liar with truth."

So, ask yourself: How do I treat people in my community? Am I patient and gentle with others that I meet, whether in stores, in cars, in church parking lots, in restaurants, at school, at meetings, at sports events? Do I treat them with respect?

Being gentle is being strong. Meekness is not weakness. It's the way to live a blessed life, and the way to become more Christlike.