

Tender Care

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up soil?'"

"Sir," the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" (Luke 13:6-9.)

There are times when we all feel that the world has given up on us, saying we are no longer worth the effort and just taking up space, that it would be better if we were cut down and tossed aside. But Jesus is our Gardener, the one who desires to care for us gently and patiently. He'll dig around us, nurture us, even prune us back when necessary, but always so that we will bear fruit in him. We can share that gentle patience with those around us as well, being Jesus' hands in the lives of others. This week, let's study together what it means to be like Jesus in his gentleness.

Monday – Fruit of the Spirit

"Think truly, and thy thoughts shall the world's famine feed. Speak truly, and each word of thine shall be a fruitful seed. Live truly, and thy life shall be a great and noble creed." Horatius Bonar, 19th c. Scottish pastor

1. Please read Galatians 5:22-25. When you look at these attributes, what does it mean to you that the Holy Spirit is the one causing this fruit to grow? What is bound to happen if we try to bear this fruit in our strength or abilities?
2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit according to John 14:15-16, 25-26? How will this help you to bear the Spirit's fruit listed in Galatians 5? Ask God to grow in you his spiritual fruit.

Digging Deeper (optional): Read Jude 1-25. How are fruitless people described there? What is the role of those who follow Jesus? What does God offer us in verses 1-2 and 24-25?

Tuesday – Gentleness: fruit that's always in season

"The way to overcome the angry man is with gentleness, the evil man with goodness, the miser with generosity and the liar with truth." Indian proverb

1. Please read Galatians 5:22-25. How does each one of these attributes enhance gentleness?
2. What does Paul mean when he says, "Against such things, there is no law?" Is there ever a time when you should not show any of them? Why?
3. According to Proverbs 15:1-4, what comes from gentle, wise and healing words?
4. What about harsh, foolish and deceitful statements? What do they yield? How does verse 3 assure us that none of this gets by God's notice?

Making it Personal: Ask God to show you how you can be gentle in your words and actions today. If you are in need of comfort, ask him for someone who will bring you gentle, wise and healing words.

Wednesday – Barriers to Gentleness

"The more vigor you need, the more gentleness and kindness you must combine with it. All stiff, harsh goodness is contrary to Jesus." Francois Fenelon, 17th-18th c. French theologian

1. Please read Colossians 3:1-9. How can each of the negative actions listed there interfere with being gentle in specific situations?

Text Insight: In verses 8-9, the focus is on speech. God is as concerned with our words as our actions.

2. What wonders and dangers are identified with the tongue in James 3:1-12? Where do you recognize yourself in these verses?

Making it Personal: What barriers are there to your gentleness? Ask God to help you overcome them.

Thursday – Gently Bearing with Others

"Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength." Francis de Sales, 16th-17th c. Swiss clergyman

1. Please read Colossians 3:9-14. How does a lifestyle of honesty, called for in verse 9, help you with the qualities of verse 12?
2. What type of forgiveness and love is described in verses 13-14? Why would it help you bear with others?
3. How important is forgiveness to Jesus in Matthew 6:14-15? According to 1 John 4:19-21, where do you get the ability to carry out Jesus' instructions on forgiveness?

Prayer Focus: Is there a situation in which you are being called upon to bear with another. Ask God for his grace to do so.

Friday – Peace and Gratitude

"I learned that it is the weak who are cruel, and that gentleness is to be expected only from the strong." Leo Rosten, 20th c. Polish-American writer

1. Please read Colossians 3:15-17. In what way will gentleness assist you in carrying out these instructions?
2. What does it mean to let "the word of Christ dwell in you richly" as you admonish others? What part does gentleness play in this?
3. How does the peace of verse 15, the gratitude of verse 16, and the final instruction in verse 17, all work together in living a life built upon Christ, including his gentleness?

Making it Personal: Pray for God to open your eyes today to opportunities to exercise gentleness.

For the Weekend: Re-read Galatians 5:22-23 and Colossians 3:12, and list the common ideas.

Which

of them seem most significant for your life right now? Why? What should you say to God about

this?