

Well, it's funny how God's timing works in a lot of life. We've been in this series called, "Believe" since September, with a break for Advent and Christmas. I laid out the series last August, simply following the order of the chapters in the Believe book – starting with chapter one and working through chapter 30. And here we are on Mother's Day, and the topic that fell on today is "Gentleness." It's a word that we associate moms...and dads...but perhaps especially we associate it with moms. It's also an ideal for how we'd like our kids to treat one another, how a husband and wife treat one another, and it extends from the home out into the rest of our relationships as well. At least, that's the ideal. Living with gentleness can be challenging some times, can't it? And maybe our belief statement for the day is one we feel difficulty in saying with integrity, but here it is: **"I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in my dealings with others."**

If you're anything like me, that statement is not true 100% of the time in your life. It comes and goes, and seems to "go" when I need it most, when things get tough. And isn't that the way gentleness works, much like some of the other Fruit of the Spirit? Joy is easy when there aren't sad or difficult things in life. Patience is easy when traffic on 405 is moving at the speed limit or all the lights are green for you on 85th. Self-control is easy when there's no ice-cream in the house. But when tragedy strikes, traffic backs up, or someone walks in the house with a tub of Moose Tracks...all bets are off! That's when we need to yield our will to the Spirit of God, so we would exude the Fruit of the Spirit, and not the fruit of the flesh.

And with Euodia and Syntyche, we see that something was coming between them that was not being handled with gentleness, and was impacting the church in Philippi. **They were having a disagreement and it was interfering with the unity of the church.** Paul doesn't mention what is going on between them, but earlier in the letter, in the first chapter, Paul spends quite a bit of time encouraging the whole church there to be in unity...To find unity in Jesus. And now here as the letter gets near the end, he comes back to that theme, but on a much more personal level with Euodia

and Syntyche.

Clearly, their conflict had become a fairly significant problem – to the point that someone got word to Paul about it, and he felt compelled to address the situation. Now, I know that many of your Bibles probably have the heading between verses 3 and 4 that says, “Final Exhortations” or something along those lines. We need to remember that those headings are put in by the publishers as navigational tools to help us find our way through Scripture...and they are useful and I’m glad they’re there. But they were not part of the original text. And: **Sometimes they have the unintended consequence of dividing a passage where we ought not to divide it.** That’s the case here, where it separates this plea for Euodia and Syntyche to get things worked out and for others to help them...it separates that from verses 4-7 where they’re given the exhortations to be joyful, let gentleness be evident, not to be anxious and to present their requests to God...it separates those things from the context of the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche. These exhortations are for the church in general, but certainly they apply to Euodia and Syntyche, too.

And one of those exhortations is in regards to gentleness. **Their disagreement with each other should still be expressed with gentleness – as well as joy, a lack of anxiety, and covering it all in prayer.** And the “gentleness” exhortation is distinguished from the others as Paul reminds them that they’re being watched by the world. “Let your gentleness be evident to ‘all.’” How they treat one another matters in their witness to the world. People are watching how we Christians live our lives, and asking – either explicitly or implicitly: Is their living in line with their believing? Is Jesus evident in how they live? **How Jesus’ disciples interact with people shapes what people think about Jesus.** It’s a big responsibility, and we can never do it on our own. We need to confess that, and ask the Holy Spirit to help us live Godly lives. And God’s promise is that He is faithful, which we looked at last week in Paul’s sermon, and because God is faithful He will give us what we need to live with gentleness.

Now, when we think of gentleness, or being gentle, we might associate it with being weak, and therefore perhaps have a bit of a negative view of it.

But that really isn't it at all. **Gentleness is strength with a soft touch – like a mom or a dad who has the strength to hold their child, but to do so in a way that is soft and appropriate for a child.** In our house, we have a bunny rabbit, as you may know. Her name is Poppy. “P-o-p-p-y.” Sometimes I think we gave her one too many “p’s and not enough “o’s” and we should have spelled it “p-o-o-p-y”...but that’s probably irrelevant. Anyway, when you hold a bunny, they can be a little squirmy. They get spooked easily. They can be wiggly and sometimes they try to hop out of your arms. She jumped out of Gwen’s grasp just this last Thursday evening. So you’ve got to hold them with a degree of firmness or they’ll go flying out of your arms. But you can’t squeeze them too hard or you’ll hurt them. That’s what gentleness is: it has a solid core and foundation to it, but it is sensitive to others so as not to harm them.

A gentle person is like that. For instance:

- **A gentle person speaks the truth but does so in a way that others can receive it.**
- **A gentle person listens to others genuinely, with a sincere desire to understand the other person and their viewpoint and desires.**
- **A gentle person seeks to help people to make the right decisions by giving appropriate input or careful persuasion, but not by forcing those decisions – because the gentle person knows force is never received well.**

True gentleness that God works out in our lives is modeled by Jesus. There are many times we see Jesus live with this combination of strength and tenderness, but let me remind us of a couple. First is in Matthew 11, where Jesus says these famous words, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).** So He’s not strong and callous but he’s not “nice” and weak. He’s not a brute, and he’s not a wuss. He’s gentle. There’s an inner, spiritual strength to carry our sins and our spiritual burdens – it’s rest for our souls he offers, after all – but he’s gentle and humble as well.

And then another place where we see this gentleness is on the cross. There, Jesus really lives out his invitation to find rest in him. And even while he's got nails through his wrists and his feet and his side is pierced, plus the spiritual agony of our sins that he bore...even in the midst of that he has the compassion and the tenderness to say, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

We see here that: **There is strength and a resolve that Jesus has, but it's wrapped in love and grace.** And isn't that how moms and dads are called to be with our kids? We all are...but it's Mother's Day, so let's zero in on that parental relationship for a moment. We parents, if we're disciples' of Jesus – and I realize the strong possibility exists that not everyone here this morning is – but for those who are: we have strength of conviction about what we believe about Jesus (Lord and Savior) even if we don't have all our questions answered; we have moral and ethical strength that is rooted in our faith and in Scripture; and of course we have physical strength, and more. But it's all wrapped in love as we raise up these kids who are entrusted to us. We don't beat them over the head with our areas of strength or with our convictions, but we aren't wimpy about it, either. We treat them with gentleness.

Did you read the article this week in the Seattle Timesⁱ about the bald eagle that flew right through a living room plate glass window, sending glass everywhere? This is a true story from Alaska about an eagle that had an off-day of flying. I think the couple who owned the home should have named him "Eddie the Eagle." ☺ Here is a **Picture**. Why they didn't get a selfie with it, I don't know. ☺ So it came crashing into this house, and then in an effort to get back out of the house (which it eventually did), with its 8-foot wing-span, it was knocking things off of shelves, pictures off the walls, and so forth. The homeowners said it looked like a bomb had gone off in their house. (Though other than the broken window, it kind of looked like our home; four kids = one eagle.) And it's a great reminder that we don't want to be like that eagle with the people in our lives, beating them with our strengths, our convictions, and so forth. We don't want to treat our kids or other people like that at all – wild and reckless and causing all kinds of damage. It's not how God calls His people



to live. That's not good fruit being born in our lives. We have to have love and grace as well the strength.

That's not to say we get it right 100% of the time: People can wear our gentleness down. If I had a nickel for every time I had to persuade one of my kids to get to bed on time or get out of bed to get to school on time, I could retire by now. And that was just in the last week. ☺ If I'd gotten those nickels for the last several years, I could fund all of your retirements, too! Gentleness can be difficult when you keep encountering the same challenges over and over and over again. The balance of the scale can tip, and gentleness can slip away and we can become like that eagle thrashing about in the house.

What then? Do we sweep our behavior under the rug and pretend everything's ok? Do we get defensive and blame others? Those are both tempting ways to go; and while they might feel good in the moment, they only exacerbate our lack of gentleness and lead to unhealthy relationships – with our kids, our spouses, and others. **That's why Paul called out Euodia and Syntyche by name in the letter and asked them to resolve their conflict and for the church to help them do so: the unhealthy dynamics in their relationship were impacting others.** It was spreading out, and they needed gentleness in their dealings with one another.

So the right thing to do is to *confess* our lack of gentleness. Whether we recognize it on our own or whether it takes someone else opening our eyes to see it, we must come to a point where we acknowledge it and confess our ungentle behavior, ask for forgiveness, and commit to living a Holy-Spirit led life that exudes all of the Fruit of the Spirit, including gentleness.

And I don't mean just confessing it to God; I mean confessing it to the people in our lives, too – including our children. When we do this, we show our kids what it means to take responsibility for our ungentleness (and the other sin in our lives) and it gives them the opportunity to extend forgiveness. When we have the humility and courage to do that, not only do we grow in faith and learn to depend on the Holy Spirit in our living, we also point our children to Jesus. Or whoever it may be that we fess up to – our spouses, our friends, our co-workers – we help point them to Jesus. **Confessing our ungentle**

behavior and asking for forgiveness becomes an act of discipling others, as we follow Jesus together. So one of the best things you can do as a parent is confess your sin. Your kids see it anyway, right? They know when we've crossed a line. And if we don't confess it, then we're effectively communicating to them that this behavior is ok. And I don't think that's what we want to communicate to our children.

So moms – as well as dads – and any of you who have an influence on the life of a child: it's a high calling to raise up children. It's challenging. But we can do so with gentleness: with strength wrapped up in love. With Jesus as our model, and the Holy Spirit active in our lives, we can exude gentleness in all of our relationships. There's no need to have those moments where you're like a bull in a china shop or an eagle in a home. But when those times happen, it's an opportunity to model confession and seek forgiveness, and through that God will draw everyone closer together, and closer to Jesus...and making gentleness a more abundant fruit in everyone's life.

Let's join together in today's statement of belief about gentleness, and even if it isn't as true of ourselves as we'd like, let it be the goal to which God calls us so we would bear the fruit of gentleness: **“I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in my dealings with others.”** Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/eagle-with-8-foot-wing-span-crashes-into-alaska-home/?utm_source=marketingcloud&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Morning+Brief+5-10-19_5_10_2019&utm_term=Active%20subscriber