

Gentleness



Fruit of the Spirit (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you on one of the most beautiful themes of all Scripture: the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Yesterday I spoke to you about the fruit of faith or faithfulness. I explained that these are like the two sides of one coin. One side is depending—that's faith. On the other side being dependable—that's faithfulness.

Today I'm going to speak about the fruit of gentleness. The word in the original Greek can equally well be translated gentleness or meekness. Some versions use one word, some the other. Whichever word we use, we need to bear in mind that gentleness includes meekness and meekness includes gentleness. For a few moments, I'll use the word meekness.

The first thing I need to say is that meekness is not weakness. Many people think that but, as a matter of fact, the exact opposite is true. Meekness is the demonstration of strength.

One good way, I think, to illustrate this from the natural world is to consider a jet airliner. It's my privilege to travel very frequently by jet airplane. I've traveled on them for a number of years. I've gone up from the 707 to the 727, from the 727 to the 747. When I first began traveling in jumbo jets, one of the things that amazed me was the gentleness with which they touched down. I couldn't conceive how such a tremendous construction weighing so many tons, carrying maybe 400 human bodies, could come down with such amazing gentleness. It's my impression that a 747 lands more slowly than a smaller jet like a 707 or a 727.

I remember at one time I was on a jet that was landing and I'd been very busy preaching and I was somewhat tired and just before we landed, I dozed off in my seat. When I woke up, we were at the gate. So gently had we landed that it didn't even wake me up.

Think of that vast construction of metal and all the other elements that make up a jet airplane, coming down so gently that it doesn't even wake up a person dozing in a chair. Would you say that is weakness? Obviously not. It's a superb demonstration of skill and strength. That's what meekness is. It's a superb demonstration of skill and strength.

Suppose that big jet had come down with a loud bang and a bump and a thud and rattled and thumped along. What would that have indicated? Strength? Or weakness? Obviously, weakness. And that's how some people are who think they're strong. They shout, they stamp their foot, they raise their voice, they're abusive. That's not strength, that's weakness.

Another thing we need to understand is that gentleness or meekness goes together with authority. And that, again, is contrary to natural thinking.

For five years I was principal of a college for training teachers in East Africa and I learned that the African idea of authority in a teacher is to carry a big stick and shout. Well, I had to go against this. I had to explain to my students authority is not carrying a big stick and shouting. As a matter of fact, it's really an indication of insecurity and lack of authority. If you have to shout, you don't have authority. And I told them then the key to authority is being under authority. If you're under authority, you have it.

Let's look for a moment at the example of Moses. It's stated of Moses in Numbers 12:3:

> "(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)" (KJV)

So Moses, in his day, was the meekest man on earth. Was Moses a weakling? Did Moses lack authority? Very much the opposite. There probably is no human character in the Scripture that ever had greater authority than Moses but his authority came out of his meekness.

How did Moses acquire his meekness or his gentleness? The answer is by submitting to the dealings of God in his life. At the age of 40, Moses was all ready to deliver his people Israel in his own strength. He went out, got angry, and killed an Egyptian and had to run for his life. His attempt to do it in his own strength was a total failure. Then came forty years in the desert, a non-entity, looking after his father-in-law's sheep. I imagine that's a pretty humbling way to live, to look after your father-in-law's sheep--on what the King James picturesquely calls the "back side of the desert."

Moses spent the next forty years doing that. At age 80, was he finished? No, he was ready to begin. Why? Because he had been drained of his own strength and self-confidence. It took God eighty years to drain Moses of what human beings call strength. But once he was drained of his own strength and his own self-confidence, then there was room in him for God's strength, which is manifested in meekness.

You see, as long as we're operating in our own strength, we don't make room for God's strength. In the 40th chapter of Isaiah, it says that God increases strength to them that have no strength. In other words, when we come to the end of our strength, that is when God's strength can begin in our life. Coming to the end of our own strength in conduct is manifested in meekness.

Now, how did Moses hold out during those forty years in the desert when there was very little circumstances to encourage him? The answer is he kept his eyes on the Lord. Hebrews 11:27 tells us this about Moses:

> "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen." (NAS)

How did Moses see Him who is unseen? That is, how did he keep his eyes on God all through those forty years in the desert? The Scripture says, "By faith." Bear that in mind. It's faith that enables us to see the invisible. And it's faith that keeps us going when there's nothing in our circumstances to encourage us.

"Well," you will ask, "what does God have to do in us to produce gentleness or meekness?" I believe the answer lies in a very distinctive phrase that's used in the Scripture. The phrase is "a broken spirit." In Psalm 51:17 we have a statement made by David. It comes in the midst of his prayer of repentance after he realized the awfulness of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. In tremendous contrition (repentance), he humbled himself before God and poured out the beautiful prayer that's contained in Psalm 51. But in verse 17, near the end of the psalm, David says this:

> "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." (NAS)

The kind of sacrifice that God is looking for in us today is not a bullock or a sheep on an altar, but it's something deep down inside each one of us—a broken spirit. There's a great difference between a surrendered will and a broken spirit. A surrendered will says, "I'm going to do God's will no matter what it costs." And then when God's will is unattractive and not what we thought it would be, we grit our teeth, we clench our fists, we hold out and we say, "I'm going to do God's will. I'm going to do God's will." But there's a tremendous amount of internal struggle. There's a lot in us that resists God's will. We may conform outwardly but inwardly there's still opposition to the will of God.

I'm reminded of the story of the little boy in church who was sitting beside his father and kept standing up in the pew. And every time he stood up, his father pulled him down and made him sit down. The third time that it happened, the father pulled him down and spanked him. So the little boy remained seated but he looked up at his father and he said, "I may be sitting down on the outside but on the inside I'm standing up!" Well, that often is like our attitude to God. We're conforming outwardly but inwardly we're still resistant. Now that's the difference between a surrendered will and a broken spirit. A broken spirit does not react, it does not fight back, it does not answer back, it does not justify itself, but it makes room for the Holy Spirit to work.

I remember once hearing the testimony of a teen-aged girl who had been having tremendous problems in her relationship with her mother. Every time her mother scolded her or demanded that she do something, she wanted to answer back and justify herself. But one day she gave this testimony: She had had a run-in with her mother and she said, "You know, the marvelous thing was I didn't even want to answer back." That's a broken spirit.

Well, how can a broken spirit come in your life or in mine? I want to suggest to you there are two possible ways. One is through a gradual process like Moses. Forty years in the desert. The other is through a crisis—that's like David. Suddenly he was confronted with the terribleness of his sin and his spirit broke.

So as I close my talk today, I just want to ask you this question: Will you give God permission to work in you a broken spirit? True gentleness? True meekness?

Well, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. I'll be dealing with the final form of the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of self-control.

Radio Program

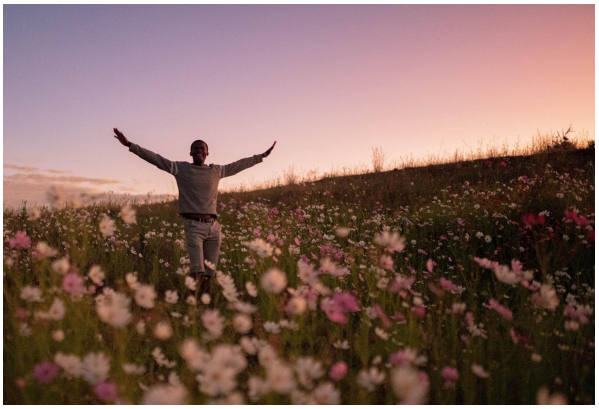
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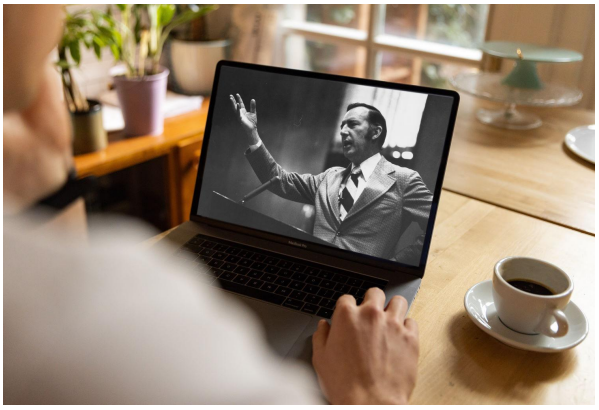
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