



Family Values

Virtue Realities

Gentleness

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As I am writing this insert, our country is preparing for the first anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy. This event is an on-going reminder of the presence of violence and terrorism in the world. In response to such horrific acts, it is easy for us to become hardened and calloused and focus our energy on seeking revenge. "Let's give back what we got!" becomes the battle cry. This is not to say that terrorists should go unpunished; however, if we become insensitive, unfeeling and obsessed with revenge, then we lose our ability to nurture and care for one another.

Certainly most people recognize the need to respond with gentleness to those most directly affected by the tragedy. Yet there is also a tendency to say, "Get over it and move on," even though for all of us the memory remains. This tendency is compounded by the fact that in our culture, gentleness is considered a feminine trait. It is associated with weakness, softness, indecisiveness and lack of willpower. Ironically "gentle" is the defining feature in gentleman. In light of all that has happened this past year, is it possible that we need "gentle" men and women more than ever before? Could it be that a spirit of gentleness is what is most called for to counteract the violence in our society?

There are several examples in the Bible of gentleness in response to violence. When Jacob returns to his brother whose birthright he stole, Esau welcomes him back with open arms and tears. Rather than enslave his brothers who sold him into slavery, Joseph instead speaks kindly to them and provides for them. The Good Samaritan, an outcast, demonstrates neighborliness by gently ministering to the victim of violence on the side of the road. When one of Jesus' disciples cuts off the ear of the high priest's slave, Jesus calmly replaces the severed part and suggests that this is not the way to go.

The prophet Isaiah asks God to "*speak tenderly to Jerusalem,*" while recognizing even though the Lord God "*comes with might,*" He will gently lead the sheep. (Is.40) David recognizes in 2 Sam. 22:36 that God's gentleness has made him great. Jesus shows his gentleness

especially to children who he welcomes, touches and holds up as an example for all of us. Paul encourages the Philippians to "*let your gentleness be known to everyone.*" (Phil. 4:5) He also tells Timothy, "*The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness.*" (2 Tim. 2:24f) In Proverbs we learn that "*a soft answer turns away wrath*" and "*a gentle tongue*" sustains life.

Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit. It is a characteristic of the "wisdom from above." Gentleness is a . . .

- tender touch to a hurting child;
- quiet response to an intense outburst;
- warm smile to a grief stricken spouse;
- caring welcome to a stranger;
- firm, yet compassionate, resolve in the face of opposition.

Gentleness promotes calm in the midst of chaos, sets limits without intimidating and creates an atmosphere of trust and safety.

The following are ways to practice gentleness:

1. **Pray for gentleness.** Daily ask God to bless you with a spirit of gentleness.
2. **Model gentleness.** Respond to children, your spouse and other adults with calm assurance and kindness. Picture yourself as a gentle person.
3. **Reward your children for gentleness.** Let them know that you appreciate their acts of kindness and gentle responses to others.
4. **Gently admonish acts of cruelty.** Let children know firmly and honestly that it is not ok to hurt another person. Keep it short and to the point, explaining why you disapprove; for example: "Joey is crying because you took his toy away."
5. **Be gentle to yourself.** Use written and verbal reminders to replace harsh feelings with kinder ones. Deliberately incorporate words like "gentle," "comfort" and "compassion" into your everyday language.

Affirmation: "*Today I will walk on the gentle side of the street.*"

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