

Topic 16: Faithfulness & Gentleness

Becoming God's Humble Servant

“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.”

—Matthew 11:29



We become like those with whom we associate.

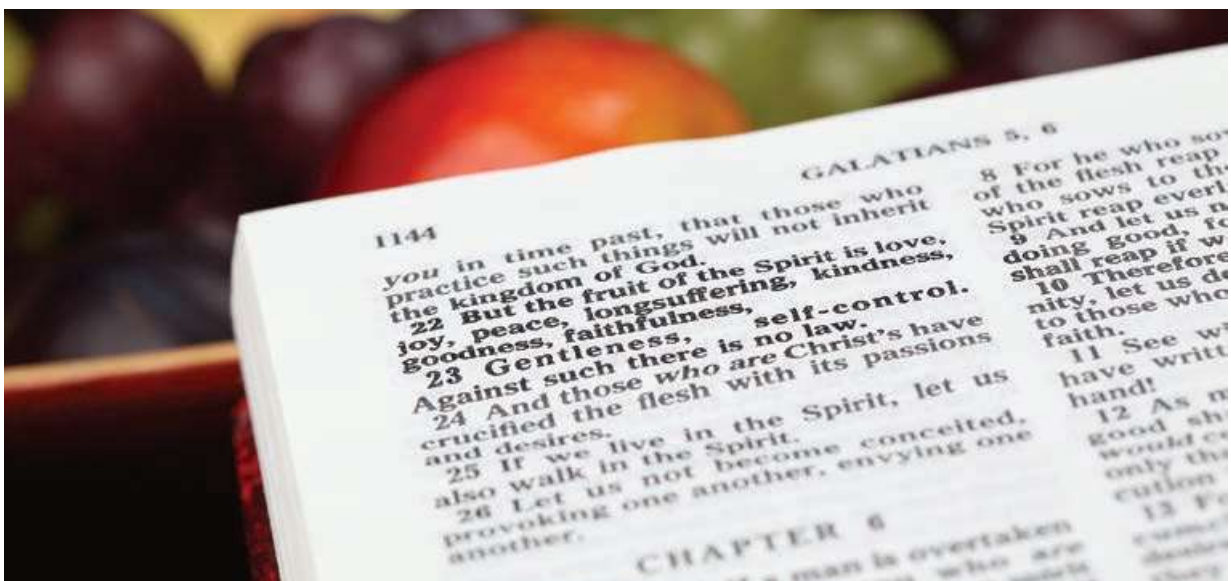
This is one of the great truisms of life. Friends tend to pick up each other's speech habits. Roommates mimic one another's mannerisms. Couples begin to think alike and sometimes even to look alike!

In other words, it's not just adolescents who battle peer pressure. All of us are susceptible to the influence of others. This is why the Bible warns us to avoid bad company (1 Corinthians 15:33) and to “walk with the wise” (Proverbs 13:20). This does not mean that we avoid unbelievers (many

are good citizens), but we avoid people who get us into trouble.

For followers of Christ, this truism is fantastic news. It means by spending time *with* Jesus, we really can become *like* Jesus. In Galatians 5:22–23 we are given a snapshot of the heart of Jesus, an example of the way he lived.

In this lesson, we want to examine the virtues of *faithfulness* and *gentleness*. What are these qualities, and what do they look like in a disciple's life?





Bible Study

Faithfulness

One of the traits that Paul says marks Spirit-filled followers of Christ is faithfulness. The Greek word is *pistis*, which is almost always translated “faith,” though it can be rendered “faithfulness.” It conveys confidence, certainty, or trust. To have faith is to have those things; to be faithful is to inspire such things in others.

“Faithful people have always been in a marked minority.”—A. W. Pink

Ponder these verses that highlight the faithfulness of our God:

- ▶ “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22–24).
- ▶ “But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory” (Hebrews 3:6).
- ▶ “If we are faithless, [Jesus] remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13, ESV).

1. Having pondered these verses, how would you describe faithfulness?

In everyday terms, to be faithful means to be dependable. It means to be trustworthy, loyal, and consistent. A faithful person is reliable. You can count on him or her. If you are faithful, it means you will be there. You’ll show up. You’ll do what you said. You’ll keep your promises—even when you’re tired, or don’t feel like it.

2. Describe a time in your life when you were blessed by God’s faithfulness.



The Difference Faithfulness Makes

When a person is faithful—literally “full of faith”—it leads to a radically different life!

Expressions of Faith	→	Faithful Actions
“I was made by God—for his glory.”	→	“I refuse to live today as if life is all about me.”
“I am called and sent by God.”	→	“I will seek my place in God’s kingdom.”
“I am uniquely blessed and gifted by God.”	→	“I will use all that God has given me to serve and to bless others.”
“God has promised to meet all of my needs in Christ Jesus.”	→	“This frees me up to move toward others and meet their needs.”
“Jesus has called me to be his disciple—to follow him and become like him.”	→	“I will serve others, pouring out my life as Jesus served and poured out his life.”
“Jesus is Lord of heaven and Earth—I will stand before him one day and give an account for how I have lived.”	→	“I will live this day, with that day in view.”

Gentleness

3. How would you define the word “gentleness”? What words or images come to mind when you think of someone who is gentle?

The Greek word for “gentleness” is *prautes*. It was used in ancient times to refer to a *tame* beast, a *pleasant* person, or a *lenient* punishment. When this word gets translated as “meek,” it is wrongly understood by some to suggest weakness or wimpiness—being soft or a pushover or a doormat. This is *not* the biblical idea.

“Jesus made this absolutely plain. The chief characteristic of Christian leaders . . . is humility not authority, and gentleness not power.”
—John Stott

A tamed circus elephant is enormously powerful, but its strength is under control as it gently goes through its paces. Biblical gentleness is the same way. Instead of “powering up” in tense situations and “going off” on people when they do irresponsible things, gentle people allow the Spirit of God



to pervade their lives. They are calm, humble, non-threatening—the very opposite of harsh or irritated. Instead of the power of pride and anger, a gentle disciple of Jesus opts for the power of humility. And as Proverbs 15:1 indicates, anger is no match for gentleness and humility!

Consider how the prophet Isaiah described God’s Servant, the Messiah—Jesus—who would one day come: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice” (Isaiah 42:3).

4. When in your life have you been most touched by the gentleness of Christ? What were the circumstances? What happened?

For a great snapshot of faithfulness and gentleness in action, we need look no further than the actions of Christ on the night he was betrayed.

- ▶ He gathered together with his disciples—despite knowing that before the night was through, they would all betray, deny and/or desert him. Nevertheless, he was faithful to them and gentle with them. He tenderly washed their feet. He earnestly taught them important truths. He passionately prayed for them.
- ▶ And he wasn’t only faithful to his followers. In his prayer he mentioned his utter faithfulness to the task God had given him to do (John 17:4).
- ▶ Later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, even when he was grieved by the terrible reality of what awaited him, he reiterated his desire to be faithful to the Father’s will (Luke 22:42).
- ▶ Then, when violence broke out and one of those who had come to arrest him suffered a wound, Jesus gently touched the man and healed him (Luke 22:51).

What humility! What a servant! No one ever faced greater pressure or stress than Christ did on that night. And yet, he responded to every situation and every person with absolute faithfulness and gentleness.

What’s your takeaway from this session? On a separate sheet of paper, journal your thoughts, perhaps even a prayer.



Take-Home Reflections

The following time-tested practice is called by different names. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru) called it “spiritual breathing.”

Essentially, it is taking a few moments to get alone in God’s presence. If you find your heart and mind don’t want to calm down, ask the Lord for internal peace.

- ▶ Breathe deeply. Recognize that God is with you and in you. Remember that he is gracious and kind. Through Christ, God is your heavenly father who cares for you. Trust his love.
- ▶ Ask him to show you any attitudes or actions that are inconsistent with a life lived in God. So, for example, as God points out your worry over a situation beyond your control—your fear over

finances or health, a critical spirit toward someone, harshness toward your children—release these things into God’s grace and care.

- ▶ Don’t be in a rush. Linger in God’s presence. Don’t self-diagnose. Let God reveal. When he identifies things that are making your soul sick, respond in humility. Don’t resist. Agree with God, and accept his forgiveness. This is really what “confession” is (see 1 John 1:9).
- ▶ Express your desire to be rid of everything toxic, to live in freedom, and to repent—to change your thinking and behavior about unhealthy things. Then ask to receive the blessings that God wants to give you.

Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God’s truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you’ve learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our verse, Matthew 11:29.
2. In one sitting, read John 13–21. Put yourself in the narrative. Pretend you are there with the twelve disciples. Watch Jesus. Pay close attention to his words. Notice his humility—how he serves faithfully and gently.
3. Wrestle with one or two of the following:
 - ▶ Can you think of some ways in which you think, talk, act, look, and dress like other people with whom you spend a

lot of time? What other characteristics might you be picking up from them?

- ▶ Who are some of the people in your life you’d classify as “gentle”? What specifically do they do or not do to warrant this description?
- ▶ What are some specific areas of your life in which you could stand to be more faithful—either from God’s point of view or toward other people?
- ▶ We all have “pet peeves”—things that tend to get under our skin, and cause us to react strongly instead of gently and humbly. What are some of your pet peeves? How do you handle them?