



## OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

AT THE FORGE

GENTLENESS: FORGING NEW PATHS

OCTOBER 29 – NOVEMBER 4, 2017

### SERMON OUTLINE

#### Gentleness: Forging New Paths

John 12:12-19

**Gentleness: Channeling power onto peaceful paths.**

Jesus models that:

1. A person with power should choose the peaceful path.
2. Gentle actions nudge others towards the peaceful path.
3. A gentle path of peace disarms opposition.
4. A gentle path paved with humour can be a powerful defuser.

**Gentleness is a powerful weapon to be used with wisdom.**

*What do I need to do with what I have heard today?*

## MAIN POINT

Gentleness happens when the Holy Spirit brings our power under restraint.

## THINKING THINGS THROUGH

*Connect the sermon to the study.*

- 1. Who are some of the most influential leaders in your life? What personality or character traits do such influential leaders share in common?**
  
- 2. In the sermon, Pastor Michael talked about the trait of gentleness, which he described as power under restraint. What are some ways a gentle leader might act that help us paint a picture of this trait in action?**

**Leader:** The list of qualities and characteristics that influential leaders possess is seemingly endless. Trustworthiness, charisma, and vision are among many that come to mind when describing great leaders. Less often, however, do we use words like “dependent” or “modest.” Yet it is these and similar traits that Jesus insists must define great Christian leaders, whether you are a leader at your job or in your home. God’s people are to be defined by humility. Humility is one of the quickest ways to notice if people have the fruit of gentleness in their lives. The fruit of gentleness connotes a submissive and teachable spirit toward God that manifests itself in genuine humility and consideration toward others. One of the best examples of someone in Scripture whose life demonstrated the fruit of gentleness is Moses.

## DIGGING DEEPER

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

> [HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ NUMBERS 12:1-8.](#)

- 3. Skim Numbers 11. What was behind the Israelites’ complaining? What is your gut reaction to less than ideal situations?**

## SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

**Leader:** Two years after the exodus event, the Israelites were approaching the promised land. The miraculous experience at the Red Sea was a distant memory, and the trek through the desert took its toll. It was taxing on everyone, even Moses, who begged God for relief from the burden of leadership (Num. 11:14-15). Miriam and Aaron represented the Israelite prophets and priests, the most powerful groups in the Israelite camp, and they shared in the complaining, but they took it out on their brother. In verse 1, we read that they criticized Moses on the issue of his foreign (non-Jewish) wife, who was a Cushite, or Ethiopian. But it becomes evident in verses 2-3 that their critique of his wife masked the real problem—jealousy of Moses and frustration with God (v. 2).

**4. Miriam and Aaron’s critical spirit highlighted their discontentment with God and drove a wedge in their relationship with their brother and spiritual leader. How did their reaction compare with the picture of Moses in verse 3?**

**5. In verses 6-8, God affirmed His relationship with Moses and the authority given him as God’s chosen leader. What does it say about Moses that he enjoyed this kind of fellowship with God and spiritual authority, and yet he remained gentle and humble?**

**6. Miriam and Aaron took the more human, fleshly response, which is not uncommon for us, either. What makes gentleness like Moses’ a more challenging path to take in relational conflicts?**

**Leader:** Miriam and Aaron’s complaint suggested Moses hungered for power and glory and therefore was unwilling to allow anyone to share the stage with him. But the scriptural description of Moses conveyed an entirely different picture of him as a leader (Num. 12:3). He had the power of God behind him (the very power they coveted), but he behaved like a godly man consumed by a sense of spiritual humility, meekness, or gentleness. He kept his God-given power and authority (vv. 6-8) under restraint out of interest for those whom he led.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ NUMBERS 12:9-15.

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**7. What is the specific way Moses demonstrated his gentleness in this passage? What kind of restraint might this have required, when you think about how you would have reacted in a similar situation?**

**8. Verses 14-15 explain God’s disciplinary action against Miriam. What influence do you think Moses’ gentle spirit had on the disciplinary action God chose? How else could God have responded in His wrath?**

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**Leader:** Aaron recognized the spiritual problem that caused his sister's physical malady. He turned to Moses with a plea for forgiveness. Using the language of repentance, he acknowledged the judgmental remarks as sin (v. 11). Using extremely graphic language that depicted a harsh reality of his day, he described what he considered to be the dreadful outcome of her awful disease (v. 12). In turn, Moses pleaded with the Lord to heal his sister (12:13). In Moses' time and culture, leprosy was a physical malady that isolated the diseased person from society. It meant automatic exile until the skin healed (Lev. 13). Miriam's leprosy was a consequence of her harsh attitude against Moses and God, and it resulted in temporary social exile. However for Moses, Miriam's leprosy took away any animosity he felt toward his sister. God's gentleness is on display through Moses' immediate reaction to her condition and advocacy on her behalf. His gentleness had his sister's best interest at heart.

**9. Miriam was exiled from the community because of her criticism and harsh attitude. How does a lack of gentleness exile us from other people?**

**10. Why does God value humility or gentleness?**

**11. Like kindness and patience, gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). What does this teach us about living out gentleness in daily life?**

**Leader:** Many of us think being gentle is all about being weak and light handed. The opposite is true, as both Moses and Jesus demonstrated: In Jesus' kingdom, gentleness is a fruit of self-restraint, and being gentle requires much power. This is why we are dependent on the Spirit to bring out this trait in our lives. Gentleness is never a trait we will choose or can model apart from His power at work in our lives. It begins with acknowledging that we are God's creation, not the Creator, and He is in control of our lives. Any power and authority we have has been given to us by Him, and it is to be used to glorify Him through the way we love and serve Him and others.

### **DOING LIFE TOGETHER**

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

**12. In which area of your life—family, work, school, community, church—is it hardest for you to live with a spirit of meekness or gentleness? Why do you think that is? How can we hold each other accountable to surrender to the Spirit in those areas of life?**

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**13. What is a specific relationship or situation where you need the Spirit to bring out gentleness in you? What might you need to do in order to hand over control to Him in that situation?**

**Leader:** Practically speaking, gentleness works itself out in our relationships in how we treat people, spouses, kids, and coworkers. Gentleness is actually having the ability to use one's might and authority to make a point, but instead graciously restraining it to honor the other.

### PRAYER

Ask God to help you reflect daily the quality of gentleness as you live out the gospel, and that by doing so, others would be drawn to Jesus.

### MEMORIZE

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." –Matthew 5:5

### SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

#### NUMBERS 12:1-15

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12:1. The section begins by implicating Miriam as the leader in this endeavor. She was backed by her brother Aaron, who previously had supported the seditious acts of the people in the erection and worship of the golden calf. Miriam's questioning the Cushite origin of Moses' wife was but a smokescreen for her central concern, but the ethnic issue was a timely one for the Israelites. The rabble of mixed origins had instigated a rebellion that led to considerable loss of life for the community. Miriam may have been suggesting that a little ethnic cleansing might be beneficial to the survival of the Israelites. The questioning of Moses' exclusive right as Israel's leader was at the heart of the issue, though based on a questioning of his wife's ethnicity.

12:2. The primary reason for Miriam and Aaron's complaint was now clearly stated in the resonant parallel rhetorical questions, "Does the LORD speak only through Moses? Does He not also speak through us?" Should only Moses hold the position of leadership in the prophetic community of Israel as well as the community at large? Should he hold such a unique status while yet having a foreign wife? That Miriam and Aaron possessed prophetic gifts was not the issue. Both are described in prophetic terms in the Old Testament. In the ancient Near East a number of professions like that of prophetic counsel and priestly oversight were handed down within families, much as in craft and trade skills.

12:3. A parenthetical statement by the narrator concerning the character and quality of Moses as a man and as a leader of Israel is interjected into the flow of the narrative, heightening the dramatic effect of the passage. The position of the first term "now the man" in the Hebrew text emphasizes Moses' humanity, but as an ordinary human being he had demonstrated extraordinary character

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in the area of humility. The term used is not the normal Hebrew word for humility, meekness, or weakness but one that conveys an individual's devout dependence upon the Lord. It may also describe a state one must experience before one is honored by God or man.

12:4-5. The Lord interjected Himself into the dispute suddenly and awesomely. All three siblings are summoned to come out to the Tent of Meeting, probably to the entrance of that central locale of divine revelation. One can envision Yahweh speaking to Moses, Miriam, and Aaron from the context of the Tent of Meeting, summoning them to come out from that first circle of encampment in which the priests and Levites dwelled and to come in toward the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, a meeting place for divine instruction. The hearing took place in the context of the visible evidence of the presence of the Lord, for the cloud pillar descended and stood erect at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. From the cloud pillar the Lord called forth the dissident sister and brother for a special revelatory session. The Lord normally spoke only with Moses (v. 8), but this time He directed His words toward the prophetic challengers to Moses' authority. The two of them stepped forward.

12:6-7. In poetic proclamation the Lord affirms Moses' position as the uniquely commissioned confidant of Yahweh. The emphasis in the passage is on the uniqueness of Moses as a prophet of Yahweh, a man who stands above the others among the Israelites, such as the recently endowed seventy elders, as well as above Miriam and Aaron. His calling was to a unique role as the mediator of the covenant. He elucidated the relationship between God and His people. He was the spokesman of instruction and revelation from God to the nation and the one who related to God in a uniquely clear way. Other prophets among the Israelites might receive revelation through visions (Isaiah or Ezekiel) or dreams and their interpretation (Joseph or Daniel), or they might express themselves through ecstatic utterance (Saul) or hymnic recitation (Miriam); but Moses transcended all of those types of prophets in the manner subsequently delineated.

12:8. The three lines at the beginning of the verse provide a picture of the unique relationship between Yahweh and Moses within which the faithful prophetic servant encountered some visible manifestation of the presence of God. Moses had seen plainly and openly, more than any other human had ever envisioned, that which God had allowed of himself to be observed. The encounter closes with the same language of the original complaint in 12:1. Since God spoke 'to' and 'with' Moses, how could Miriam and Aaron dare to speak "against" him. To speak against God's servant in this case was tantamount to speaking against God Himself, and He surely would respond.

12:9-10. The immediate response of the Lord to Miriam was one of anger, followed by withdrawal. The terminology of the heated response of God to the situation parallels that in 11:1 and 33. The Lord had revealed Himself to Miriam and Aaron in a special way at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. His presence in the encounter was not only one of revelation, but also one of protection while the countercharges were outlined in the indictment. The charges against the plaintiff Moses had been dismissed with resounding affirmation of his character by the ultimate Judge of all of humanity. Now the judgment against the false accuser would be meted out. When the cloud of God's presence withdrew from over and from within the Tent of Meeting, Miriam and Aaron stood in alarmed disbelief at what they observed.

12:11-12. With deep emotion Aaron immediately apologized to Moses, addressing him as lord and submissively confessing his sin of rebellion. He who had opposed Yahweh's servant so presumptuously, promptly placed himself in the servant position under that very same individual. Perhaps attempting to lighten the potential judgment against himself, he characterized his transgression as foolishness. Intentional rebelliousness was punishable by banishment or death by stoning. Out of concern for his stricken sister, he begged Moses not to hold Miriam culpable for their sin, by which she might be afflicted even further with chronic leprosy. He asked that God not afflict Miriam such that she might have the appearance of a stillborn child, whose scaly flesh would sometimes peel off with the amniotic fluids when handled after birth. He realized that if she continued in this state, she might die.

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12:13. Like Aaron's distressed appeal, Moses turns to the Lord with a great emotive entreaty, "O God, please heal her!" Faced with the dilemma of letting Miriam suffer the consequences of her rebellion against him or pray for her restoration, Moses graciously becomes the intercessor on behalf of his accuser. The close familial ties are evidenced in his response.

12:14-15. Grace and mercy are evidenced in the Lord's response to Moses, for Miriam survives the ordeal. With chronic leprosy she would have been banished from the community for life. She would have to endure, however, the consequences of her rebellion: public humiliation and isolation from the camp of the community for seven days. The seven days of separation were the standard period for the purification process for a leper. Although we are not informed about whether other elements of the cleansing ceremony outlined in Leviticus 14:1-32 were followed, such as animal sacrifice, ritual sprinkling, bathing, and shaving of the head, one might assume this standard practice was followed.

While Miriam was going through her required period of separation and ritual purification, the Israelite camp remained at Hazeroth. This delay was perhaps out of some respect or admiration for Miriam and her noble place within the community leadership. But also Israel would not disembark on the next stage of the journey to the Promised Land until the Lord would lead them by the cloud. Hence the seriousness of the rebellion of one of Israel's leaders is magnified, and the consequences of such an act would affect the entire community. They must all wait upon the Lord until He leads them. In the period of Israel's entrance into Canaan under Joshua, the sin of one man's (Achan) family resulted in their being defeated in the strategic battle at Ai (Josh. 7:1-5). Only after the restoration of one of their key leaders would the people of Israel be allowed to move toward their final destination, the promised Holy Land.