

“Gentleness”

Philippians 4:5

June 22nd, 2025

There is a story about Jesus in the Bible that speaks of his gentleness. A group of men bring before Jesus a woman caught in adultery. Moses’ law said such a woman was to be stoned. What did Jesus have to say about that, the group asked him. Jesus slowed things down. He probably took a breath and then he bent down, writing with his finger on the ground. They kept questioning him; we can feel their anxiety.

Then Jesus stood up. He finally spoke. He said, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Then again he returned to writing on the ground.

Can you imagine? Jesus did not meet them at the level of their anger and anxiety, their words and their deeds. He met them with the strength of being gentle. He slowed things down. He brought the situation down a notch.

The men left their stones and went away. They left the woman alone with Jesus.

Jesus then spoke to her. He continued to be gentle. He asked where those who would condemn her were. They were gone. Then

Jesus said to her, gently, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

Jesus exhibited gentleness here, perfectly of course, With the **power** of God’s Spirit in us, we are to exhibit **gentleness** as well. Did you hear that? Gentleness comes from **power**; it is power under control.

This is the kind of gentleness the apostle Paul is writing about in the Biblical text for today. Paul is writing to Christians in Philippi from house arrest in Rome. In the final chapter of Philippians, Paul is telling these Christians how to get along in a Christian community. He calls them to focus on the good, and to remember that their center is Christ. He also reminds them that the Lord is near. This may be to call to mind that Jesus will return soon, so they really should focus on getting along, That may remind them of either judgment or vindication Or, it may be a reminder that the Spirit’s presence is always there to draw on.

Preacher Craig Barnes has his own theory here, and it has to do with comfort. He writes:

Late at night, when you lie in bed unable to sleep, the clock on the nightstand becomes your Grand Inquisitor. You toss and turn a bit, try to calm yourself down, and then try just keeping your eyes closed. But eventually, you roll over, open your eyes, and surrender to the illuminated numbers. 2:01...2:02....2:03. You think about the work you have to get done, or the new spot you found on your arm. You think

about your financial anxieties. Then you think about your grown daughter: “She’s not really going to marry that guy, is she?”

2:04...2:05...2:06. Maybe your worries are not so dramatic. Maybe the problem is that there is no dramatic call in your life, or no relationship or dream that either inspires or conflicts you. 2:07...2:08. And it feels like the clock is silently screaming that you are running out of time.

During the daylight hours, when you are allowed the narcotic of business, you can stay numb and avoid your fears. But late at night when you are alone and undefended by distractions the anxieties return like monsters under the bed. Through all my years of pastoral ministry I have never argued someone out of their fears or anxieties. I can’t even argue myself out of my own fears. Arguments are based in logic, but fear is an emotion which just doesn’t care about logic. As any child knows, when you are afraid of the dark, the only thing that can help is when someone you love and trust comes running to embrace you. That’s why the Apostle Paul says, “The Lord is near.”

So whatever we think Paul intends here with saying “the Lord is near,” we do know that Paul says first, “Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

Preacher Holly Hearon¹ writes that we as Christians always have a choice in how we behave toward others. We can bring our anxiety into a

¹ Holly Hearon, “Commentary on Philippians 4:4-7.”

situation and ratchet up the rhetoric, or we cannot. We can stop, take a breath, and ask God to work through us. We can be gentle.

Most of you probably know who Dietrich Bonhoeffer was. But in case his name is new to you, Bonhoeffer was a Protestant minister who lived during Hitler's leadership in Germany and participated in a failed plot to eliminate Hitler. Yet in prison, he was able to reflect on his faith, and see God's gentleness, writing a poem for his fiancé entitled "By Gentle Powers."²

*By gentle Powers faithfully surrounded,
Protected wondrously, consoled by grace,
That's how I long to live these days together,
Close by your side, to start the coming year;*

*Our hearts are tortured even now by evil days,
The burdens of the past are hard to bear,
Oh Lord, grant our scared souls the salvation,
Therefore You have created us and saved.*

*And if You pass the heavy cup of suffering,
The bitter chalice, filled to the highest brim,
Then we will take it, grateful without trembling
Out of Your good and so beloved hand.*

² Translated from German to English by [Eckhard](#) and [Sabine Becker](#), February 9, 2024 (

*But if You will grant us once more the joy to see
 This world, the splendor of its beaming sun,
 Then we will surely all the past remember
 And our whole lives will be Yours alone.*

*Let warm and bright the candles' flames light up today,
 Which You have brought in our gloomy times,
 Lead us together back again if that can be!
 We know for sure, Your light shines through the night.*

*When now the silence spreads around, help us to hear
 And listen to the full embracing sound
 Of this world, which unseen around is widening
 To all Your children's highest hymns of praise.*

*By gentle Powers wonderfully sheltered,
 Awaiting fearlessly what there will be.
 God, He is near at dusk and in the morning
 And with us certainly on each new day.*

Another preacher³ writes:

*Called to imitate the gentleness of Jesus, we're far more adept at
 responding in a reactive, angry, harsh, arrogant, condemning, or*

³ "Let Your Gentleness be known to Everyone," Brewster Baptist Church.

judgmental fashion. So many of us are guilty of this, including myself, that I could easily name names... but that wouldn't be gentle.

Gentleness is the quality of being kind, tender, mild mannered; it is softness of action or effect. We think of phrases like a gentle reminder, a gentle stream or a gentle breeze.

A final portrait of God and his gentleness comes in Psalm 23.

One Biblical commentator⁴ writes:

Shepherds play a significant role in the Bible. They were the first to hear about Jesus being born, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd, and before he became the second king of Israel, David served as a shepherd. At first, this may seem confusing since shepherds were included in the lowest class when the Bible was written. But in reading Psalm 23, it's not hard to see the reason God chooses to highlight shepherds – the way they care for their sheep is a direct picture of how God responds to us with gentleness.

In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices His life for the sheep." We are the sheep that Jesus sacrificed His life for! Years before Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd, David called God our shepherd. In Psalm 23, David wrote about how God is our shepherd and how He provides for us. ...David was a shepherd himself, before God made him king. ...Psalm 23 tells us how God

⁴ Watermark Community Church.

responds to us with gentleness. He lets us rest, leads us beside peaceful streams, and renews our strength. It tells us about how He is close beside us when we are in dark valleys (hard times) and how His goodness and unfailing love will chase after us (chase us in a good way!) all the days of our lives. Praise God that He responds to us with gentleness, even when we may not recognize it!

God is gentle. Let **your** gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Amen.