

Being Gentle in a Cruel World

Matthew 5:5 - “Blessed are
the meek, For they shall
inherit the earth.”

What is Cruelty?

- Cruelty can be described as indifference to suffering and even the positive pleasure in inflicting it. Violence is not necessary for an act to be cruel.
- “Other people are as alive as you are. Cruelty is the failure to realize that other people are real and really hurt.” (Ian McEwan)
- “Man's inhumanity to his brother is our greatest sorrow. There is blindness much worse than loss of physical sight--the blindness of the heart.” (Edmund Bergler, 1949)

What is Cruelty?

- The infamous phrase “Man’s Inhumanity to Man” came from Robert Burns’ 1785 poem “From Man was made to Mourn: A Dirge”
- No other sin has moved men to blame God more than cruelty
 - “I Once Blamed God for Everything” by Gary R. Falardeau
 - I once blamed God for everything
 - But now I understand
 - The pain and strife that haunts my life
 - Is man's inhumanity to man

Kevin Carter's 1994 Pulitzer Prize winning photo of a Sudanese child struggling to make it to a UN food station



What is Cruelty?

- It is a cruel world, a fact we cannot change, wish as hard as we might.
- The only matter over which we have control in this cruel world is how we choose to react to it

Gentleness in the Face of Cruelty

- No one knew undeserved cruelty as well as Jesus Christ
 - Matt. 11:29 - “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”
 - It appeals to us because we long for a place of solace and refuge from cruelty

Gentleness in the Face of Cruelty

- Christians are instructed to be gentle and meek even in the face of adversity
 - Gal. 5:22-23 - “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”
 - Col. 3:12 - “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering”
 - Eph. 4:1-2 - “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love”

De-bunking Myths About Gentleness And Meekness

- Myth 1: Gentle people are that way because they are weak
 - This idea comes from those who place a premium on displays of physical strength or social power
 - Yet Jesus of Nazareth commanded all power in the universe (Matt. 14:32-34), and He was meek and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29)

De-bunking Myths About Gentleness And Meekness

- Myth 2: Gentle men are wimps and sissies
 - Gentleness is considered a “feminine” virtue
 - Jesus, no doubt a man (John 2:15), was gentle and compassionate toward others



De-bunking Myths About Gentleness And Meekness

- Myth 3: Gentleness means you are a pushover
 - “Not easily provoked or irritated; given to forbearance under injuries” (Webster's); in short, “power under control”
 - That is why “the meek will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). They will win, not by force, but by the ability to keep themselves under control even in extreme circumstances

The Value Of Gentleness

- Enables us to work with others
 - 1Cor. 4:21 - “What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”
 - 2Cor. 10:1 - “Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ--who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you.”
 - Luke 6:31 - “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.”

The Value Of Gentleness

- Facilitates the spread of the gospel
 - 2Tim. 2:24-26 - “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”
 - 1Peter 3:15-16 - “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.”

The Value Of Gentleness

- Increases our ability to restore erring brethren
 - Gal. 6:1 - “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

The Value Of Gentleness

- Makes us more effective in our service to God
 - James 1:21 - “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”
 - James 3:13, 17 - “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom...
17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”

The Value Of Gentleness

- Makes us more effective in service to God
 - 1Tim. 6:11 - “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.”
 - 1Tim. 3:3 - (qualifications of elders) “...not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous”
 - 1Peter 3:4 - “...the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”

How To Become Gentle And Meek

- Control anger
 - Titus 3:2 - "...to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men."
- Speak to others with encouragement
 - Eph. 4:29 - "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

How To Become Gentle And Meek

- Cultivate the fundamental Christian virtues. Gentleness and meekness are the more advanced forms of love and humility
 - If we truly love one another, we will be gentle with one another
 - If we are humble, it is easier to be meek

Lessons:

- You cannot end cruelty; it is the illegitimate offspring of the mating of selfishness and stupidity.
- What you can do is break the cycle of cruelty:
 - By refusing to participate in it
 - By refusing to perpetrate it
 - By refusing to be changed by it
 - By refusing to ignore it

Lessons:

- The only powerful, effective response to cruelty is not retaliating with more of the same or greater force still, but with steady, unflappable gentleness
- The meek will inherit the earth; the cruel will only be buried in it.