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A Heart of Gentleness

Real Change: Getting to the Heart of It

1 Peter 3:8-17

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So we are now in the fifth of our six-week series that we are calling *Real Change*. Ever since Easter, we've been walking through this series, and what we've been talking about each week is the heart that God desires to cultivate in us—heart change.

So, as we begin this morning, I have a question for you. Imagine, as you were walking in, the ushers handed you a pill, and I can verify the safety of this pill, okay? There's nothing wrong with this pill. But if you took this pill, it would rid you of the impulse or the inclination to act out in anger towards others. Maybe even we'd say it would rid you of the emotion of anger. Would you take it? Would you want to take that pill? I asked that question last night, and there was a gentleman in the front that, just real quickly, like, "Nope!" I know that the obvious kind of churchy answer for us is that, "Yeah, we should do that." But I want to sit and linger there for just a moment and consider the implications of what a life without anger would really look like.

See, I think, in our world, we've become so accustomed to anger, it's become such a routine, normal thing, that I think many people would struggle to feel like a life without anger would really be a life worth living. I think that a lot of us, if we were honest, would say that deep down, if we no longer had that rush—that exhilarating rush of emotion that comes along with anger—maybe that would make life a little less interesting. So, you imagine a life without anger—a life without gritted teeth, a life without little, subtle, anger fantasies about the way you're going to get back at that person, a life without that need to always make sure you prove that you're right, make sure you put someone in their place, even if you do it subtly—I think some people would say a life without anger would be a life that lacks vibrancy, a life that lacks color. It wouldn't be a life that would be all that enjoyable to live.

You may have seen that bumper sticker around town. It says, "If you're not outraged, you aren't paying attention." Have you seen that bumper sticker? The implication, of course, is that the only way to live a life without outrage is to be ignorant of what's really happening in the world. If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention. Our world runs on anger. It has become the norm. And I'm sorry to say that sometimes, even when I look in the mirror, I see someone who kind of likes anger. I think all of us, if we're honest, when we look in the mirror, we might say that's true of us as well.

Now, let me make one thing clear from the beginning here, that anger is a naturally occurring emotion. And as it occurs, it's neither good nor bad. Right? Anger is something that just occurs and, often, it's like an indicator light in your car. It tells you, "Hey, something's wrong here. Something is out of place." And, as such, it's not sinful. And we know that Jesus was angry, and He didn't sin. But given who we are, the question is: "What do we do when that feeling occurs?" And more often than not, I think what happens in the course of life is, we start to cultivate anger. We start to facilitate ways to act out on it; we start to have our will be aimed at the expression of

anger. And, before long, our heart starts to be shaped by anger, and even our character starts to be marked by anger. And what we're concerned about is cultivating anger that starts to shape the heart. This is what is so common in our world, and it's what can, so subtly, start to take place in our own life. That's what we're concerned about.

So, now, here's a different question. If you walked in and the pill that was given to you was a pill that would put in you a heart of gentleness—a gentle heart—would you want to take that pill? Is a gentle heart something that you long for? Is it enticing to you? See, while Scripture consistently calls us, as believers, to foster gentleness, to cultivate gentleness in our lives and in our world, I think the honest assessment is that, in our world, gentleness is not something that's looked upon with any kind of favor. We don't find gentleness in our world all that alluring. But I want to suggest to you this morning that that has more to do with the fact that we look at gentleness all wrong, not because there's something wrong with gentleness.

So the question I want to consider this morning is: In a world that is set on anger, in a world that tries to have us foster anger, what would it look like to become a people with hearts of gentleness? So, in order to do that, we're going to look at 1 Peter, Chapter 3. So, turn your Bibles with me to 1 Peter, Chapter 3. We're going to be in verses 8 to 17, but I am going to begin in verse 15, and we're going to stay there for a while. Okay? So, 1 Peter 3, starting in verse 15, Peter says this:

> **But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.** (*NASB, 1 Peter 3:15)

So as we begin, let me provide a little bit of context for this epistle as a whole. The letter of 1 Peter was written by Peter, the apostle, to a group of believers that were spread throughout the Mediterranean region, probably spread and dispersed because of persecution. And as Peter is talking to them early in this book, in the first chapter, he says to them, "I know you're experiencing various trials." Now, we think that the best explanation for those various trials is they were just enduring constant persecution, both from authorities, but also from the world around them. And so, as Peter is addressing those concerns, he is quick to remind them of two things.

The first thing Peter wants to remind them of is, for them to remember that, while they are *in* the world, they are not *of* the world. They are a different sort of people living from a different reality, and that is the reality of God and His kingdom. They are people that are marked by God. And even though they make their way around in the normal day-to-day run of events, they are living differently because they live in a different world. He, in fact, calls them aliens and strangers; this world is not their home.

And that leads him to his second exhortation: Because this world is not their home, they should live differently than those who call this world their home. There should be a different quality among them because they are citizens of a different kingdom. In other words, for us as believers, we are people who live from a different reality; we live from a different world, all while we make our way through this world. Now, that's simple enough, right? We always use that phrase—you'll hear that sometimes— "We are in, but not of, in the world but not of the world." In fact, I know someone here has that license plate: "In, not of." I've seen it in the parking lot a couple of times.

But I think it gets more difficult when we remember that this was a group of people that were being persecuted. I think it's one thing to say, "You know what? We're going to be misfits; we're going to be outcasts because our allegiance is to Christ." But I think it's a whole other thing to say, "You're going to be misfits; you're going to be outcasts, and you are going to suffer because of it. The world is going to come at you because of your allegiance to Jesus." And that is the context that these believers would have read Peter's words in. They were facing persecution; it was constantly on the horizon. For many of these early believers, it was that a constant threat of death was always right around the corner. Certainly that came from the government, but that also came from just the people that they were around in general.

I read a book a few years ago. It was a church history book with a really funny title. It was called *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*. And, in that book, they described what the process of preparing for baptism was like for believers. And part of that preparatory process was that you had to come to grips with the fact that to become a Christian was, necessarily, by definition, to become a candidate for death. Death was on the horizon. It was always a possibility.

And so, in the midst of that, Peter comes, and he exhorts; he urges these believers to do a few things. The first thing is, he says, "**Sanctify Christ as Lord"**. That just means *set Christ apar*t. Make sure your allegiance is to Him and to Him alone. Your allegiance isn't to your country. It's not to your Caesar. It's not to any of those people. Your allegiance is to Christ. You are Christ's people. And the second thing he urges them to do is to, *"**Continue to make a defense for the hope that is in you**."* It just simply means to continue to foster God's good in the world—to continue to represent God, continue to make sure that people see the goodness of God as they encounter you—both through word and deed. He exhorts them to do those two things, but then he gives them a final exhortation, and he doesn't tell them what to do, but how they're to go about it. He says, "**Yet with gentleness and reverence**." That word **reverence**, of course, refers to just the way that we view God, right? Our *awe* and our *reverence*, our fear is for God and for God alone. He has a unique place in our life.

But this word **gentleness** was the mark of how we're to operate in the world. So, I want to talk about that for a few minutes. What does it mean to be gentle? Is the word gentleness, or the idea of being gentle, is that an attractive quality to you? Is that something that you find yourself longing for? If your friends came together and said, "Hey, we decided—I know it's a little morose—but we figured out what we should put on your headstone. We're just going to put the word *gentle*. Would you be okay with that?" Would you say, "Man, you nailed it; that's exactly what I was hoping for?"

I want to talk about that for a minute, because I think it's a really important concept for us to understand. See, Peter can tell us all he wants, "Be gentle…be gentle…be gentle." But if we listen to that through ears that say, "That is not attractive at all; I want nothing to do with it," then the likelihood of us cultivating it, asking God to give it to us, is next to zero. If we listen to the words of Scripture, just generally, and we say, "You know what? I know Scripture says this, but I think I know better. I think my way works a little better," then what is the likelihood of us really pursuing that, of obeying that, of seeking to become people that live that way? Well, it's incredibly small, right? See, if we're people that, when Peter calls us and he says, "**yet with gentleness,"** and we

hear that and, deep down in our hearts, we internally kind of sneer at the idea of gentleness, and we will never embrace it; we will never pursue it.

See, throughout Scripture, when we come to a list of virtues—whether it be Paul or Peter or James listing out virtues—gentleness always makes that list. It's always in there as a distinguishing mark of what it is to be a follower of Christ, to be a Christian. When we get to Galatians chapter 5, and Paul lists out the fruit of the spirit, right there: gentleness, top billing in the fruit of the Spirit. But I think, if we're honest, our world looks at gentleness and defines it mainly as weakness or as being unassertive in life. It's passivity. That's what gentleness means to the world. But what we have to understand is that the world's definition of gentleness, that is not the Bible's definition of gentleness.

The biblical understanding of this word—of being gentle—is that a gentle person is one who shows restraint. They are someone for whom patient understanding is a mark. They're someone who has passion, but that passion is under restraint. It's controlled. It's not that they don't feel anything; it's that they feel proper things, and then they respond properly to those feelings. It's not a lack of passion; it's appropriate passion, dealing with passion appropriately. A gentle person is generous with those they encounter. Gentleness is anything but weakness. Gentleness is strength. Gentleness is a virtue.

So is that an attractive picture for you? Do you hear that and say, "Oh, I want that; I want that"? We say, at Lincoln Berean, that we are people coming together to know Jesus and become like Him. When you think of Jesus, does the word gentle come to mind? Is Jesus gentle to you? You know, it's interesting as you go through the Gospels, there is one place throughout the Gospels where Jesus stops for a moment and says, "Hey, here's what I am like. You want to know what the very core of My being is like? Here is what it is like": To Matthew, Chapter 11, Verses 28 and 29, He says this:

> **"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."**

Here's Jesus exegeting His very heart, telling us what His heart is like. What is He like? He is **gentle and humble in heart**. Some of your translations, and the more classic translations, are *gentle and lowly in heart.*

Some of you might be familiar with a book that kind of made its way around the Christian world a few years ago by an author named Dane Ortlund. Dane wrote a book just really reflecting on these two verses—just marinating on them and thinking about all that would really kind of be implicated if this is true. And, as Dane reflected on what it is for Jesus to be gentle and lowly and to describe Himself this way, he comes up with this summary statement of what Jesus is like. He says: "*Meek, humble, gentle. Jesus is not trigger-happy, not harsh, reactionary, not easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture most natural to Him is not a pointed finger but open arms."* He then concludes by saying, "*If Jesus hosted His own personal website—Jesus.com or something like Grace.org—if He hosted His own personal*

website, the most prominent line of the About Me drop-down would read 'gentle and lowly in heart.'"[1]

Aren't you so thankful that we have a gentle Lord? What kind of person must it be that the weary and the heavy-laden, the burdened, run to Him? Well, it's a gentle person, a not-easily-exasperated person, a not-trigger-happy person. We need a gentle Savior. And the world needs a little bit more gentleness in it, doesn't it? And, Church, the world needs gentle Christians. But not just the world. In our own relationships, we need gentleness. Spouses need gentle partners. Children need gentle parents. Coworkers need gentle colleagues. In the midst of a world that is so angry, gentleness is one of the most countercultural postures we could assume. Gentleness is not weakness.

Is that attractive to you? Do you long for a heart that is shaped that way? You know, as we've been walking through this series, we've focused on this idea of the heart. We said real change is change that takes place at the level of the heart. And I had to laugh last week as Jeff was talking, because he talked about how there's a cardiologist in his Life Group. And I laughed because there's a cardiologist in my Life Group. Cardiologists may be in every Life Group, lots of cardiologists. Maybe they just put them in the pastor's groups. They know we need them. But I know that if I went to the cardiologist in my Life Group, and I had to have open heart surgery, and she cut me open and sewed me back up, she could tell you an awful lot about this really important, really interesting muscle, right? About my physical heart. But, of course, we all know that, if I looked at her and said, "Did you find any gentleness in there? Was that a courageous heart that you just worked on?" of course, she would laugh at me because when we talk about the heart, we're talking about something completely different.

We're talking about a spiritual reality. The biblical understanding of the heart is that it is the very center of our life. You know, a really interesting study for you, if you have some time, would be to just do a word search for that word "heart". Type it into Bible Gateway or something, and just trace what the heart is. The heart is the very center of our life. If you were an organization, the executive center of that organization would be your heart. It directs life; it creates; it motivates. This is why Proverbs tells us to guard your heart when you're young. Why? Because it's the wellspring of life; your life flows from it. Students, that's not a dating verse. I used to think it was a dating verse. Guard your heart. That's a life verse—guard your heart—because it is centrally important. Your life flows from your heart. That's why it's so critical that we have a heart that is transformed into Christ's likeness, because a transformed life flows from a transformed heart.

Jesus said something like this when He says a good tree cannot produce bad fruit and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. A tree is known by its fruit. Now see, we're people that are prone to legalism, aren't we? It's just kind of hardwired into us. And legalism, at its root, is the idea that by outward conformity, external conformity, we can make ourselves right with God. And as we start to believe that, that results in us thinking merely about what's happening externally and we start to engage in behavior modification. How do we just change the behaviors? How do we just fix the external side of things, merely fixing the outside? The Christian life is vitally concerned with the outside. It's concerned with the fruit, to use Jesus' metaphor, but the remarkable revolution of Jesus is that what he offers is transformation of the inside, so that the outside changes produce

[1] Dane C. Ortland, *Gentle and Lowly* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2020).

fruit naturally, just as naturally as an apple tree produces apples. That's the remarkable revolution of Jesus—the change of the heart. Real change!

So now, if that's what we want, if that's what we're longing for, if that's what we're asking God to do in us, we're enticed by this vision of a gentle heart, a heart that's like Jesus. The question is: "How do we pursue it? How does it come about?" Well, to look at that, I want to look back at 1 Peter, starting in verse 8. I think now we've laid some context, that will help us see, as Peter is laying things out, how he's describing a context within which a heart of gentleness can occur. So going back to verse 8, Peter says this:

> **To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.**
> (Vs. 8-9)

I liked that Peter is kind of brief there. **To sum up,** he says. As a really unimportant New Testament note, that's the only time that anyone in the New Testament says *to sum up.* I wish that was there more often, don't you? But remember our context. He's talking to believers that are suffering persecution. And he's telling them, "Don't forget, you are in the world; you are not of the world. You live from a different place and, as such, you live a different quality, and with a different quality of life than the world at large. Your life is made of different stuff. You are Kingdom people, and because of that, your quality of life looks different." And he gives these characteristics that are supposed to be markers of this community.

And now, imagine a community like this for a second. I'm going to walk through these descriptors, and just imagine if Lincoln Berean Church, if we as a church family, embodied these qualities. Imagine what that would look like to the outside world, a world filled with frustration and angst and community that usually results in isolation. If they looked in at us and saw among us qualities like these qualities of Christ:

Harmonious just means that their life and their relationships aren't marked by discord and chaos, but peace and harmony. **Sympathetic**. They're able to enter into the suffering, the pain of others. Those on the margins have a place in this community. There's a sympathetic spirit about it. **Brotherly**. Brotherly is just a word for a certain type of love, a love that exists in a family, a familial affection. And the remarkable thing that God has done in Christ is He's taken this incredibly different, disparate kind of group of people, with all these different backgrounds, and He's brought them together and united them in Christ, and there exists between them an affection that is just like a healthy family affection. So we genuinely can look at each other and say "Brother" and "Sister."

Remember, a few weeks back when our friends were here from India, Bimon and Sunit, and they kept referring to each other as "Brother Biman" and "Brother Sunit"? My daughter thought that they were really brothers. She just doesn't hear that very often. We don't use that language very often. They're our brothers in Christ. We have a family resemblance. One of the greatest joys of my life is going and visiting that group in India, and it's amazing what God does when we get over there and, just by God's Spirit, we are united. I feel so much affection for them. I feel bonded to

them immediately. There's nothing similar about our life. Nothing! But we follow the same Lord. And we are brothers. That's a God thing. Only God can do that. A brotherly community!

Kindhearted. To be kindhearted is just the opposite of being rash and severe. It continues: **humble in spirit**. To be humble is just to recognize God as God. He is the Creator; we are the creature. We are humbly dependent upon Him and that humility, then, also kind of permeates our life together. We are a humble people. Then he says **not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead**. Now, that sounds an awful lot like Jesus, doesn't it? So people who, when others curse them, they can return that with blessing and don't take vengeance into their own hands. I think we can all agree that that would be an amazing community to live in. Amazing! We long for that. We want to become a people like that.

But I'm also thankful that Peter doesn't just say to us, "Now go do it." He tells us what is the grounding of that reality. He says, **For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.** I think what Peter is reminding us of here is, is the incredible sufficiency in which we stand because we are God's people. See, one thing that's very important for us to think about when we think about transformation is that this flows from understanding we have a God who cares for us so much that we, in His Kingdom, stand in such a place of blessing, both currently and, also, we have a blessed and glorious future. And in that sufficiency, in that knowledge, we then are freed up. We are freed up to be a blessing to others because we no longer have to worry, "Are we going to be okay?" We have a God that says, "I have your back." And that changes everything. If we come to believe that, then we're released from the need to fight for our own rights, to return evil for evil, insult for insult. We don't have to worry about our own reputation. God has that. We can trust Him with that. And then we are poised, as people, to increasingly become like Jesus, to have our hearts transformed within the sufficiency of our life with God. That's the reality we've been called into.

As Peter continues, he quotes Psalm 34. And Psalm 34 is interesting because David wrote this psalm in a context which was very dangerous. He was under duress. His life was being threatened.

> **"THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,**
> **MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.**
> **HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD;**
> **HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.**
> **FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARDS THE RIGHTEOUS,**
> **AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER,**
> **BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."** (Vs. 10-12)

Do you find yourself in the midst of struggle? Are you stuck between a rock and a hard place? Are you tempted to take things into your own hands? Well, David reminds us, and Peter refers to that psalm, and it's a reminder that we trust God with those things. We continue to pursue righteousness. Why? Because we stand in a place where we have a God that sees us and that hears us. And the evildoer has no such assurance. David says the face of the Lord is set against those who do evil. We stand in a place of sufficiency: Our God sees; our God hears; He is not ignorant of what we are walking through.

Then as Peter continues in Verse 13, he asks the question about what happens if harm still occurs?

> **Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED.** (Vs. 13-14)

I think Peter is essentially kind of making a proverbial statement. We all know that, generally, it is true, if we are doing good in the world, it is generally a safe and a sure bet that we're probably not going to have evil come back at us. But Peter's listeners know keenly that sometimes when we do what is right, when we do what is good, when we stand up for God's ways, sometimes that is the cause of trouble, isn't it? And I have no doubt that everyone in this room, at different times, either has experienced or will experience what it is to suffer because you are holding up the truth, because you are standing up for what God calls good. And what does Peter say? In light of the goodness of God, in light of who He is, in light of the fact that we are blessed, that means God's good is poured all over us. In light of that, even the suffering that we are experiencing is mild when seen in comparison with the blessedness that we experience now and the blessedness that is to come.

It's a little bit like when Paul says, *"To live is Christ; to die is gain"*. Now who can say that except someone that is sufficiently satisfied in God, and believes that his future with God is very bright, even if death should occur? It's an incredible confidence, and brings us back to our initial verse, verse 15:

> **…But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.** (Vs. 15-17)

Now, none of what Peter says, in terms of this posture in life, is possible apart from Christ—none of it! If we try to do that in our own strength, we are toast. See, what Peter is describing is a life that is possible for you and me when we are supremely satisfied in God and we know, deep down in the recesses of our heart, that we are safe with Him. Even as the world around us is chaotic, we are safe with Him. Just as we reflected on last week, we have a Shepherd that allows us to say we lack nothing. So we, as a people, we are so prone to legalism and then the behavior modification that flows from it. And the tempting thing for us to do is to hear about gentleness and say, "I need to grit my teeth really hard and be gentle this week. I will be gentle; white knuckles, make it happen!"

But that is not the way of Christ. That is not the way of transformation of the heart. See, biblically, gentleness is grounded in an acceptance of who God is and of how He has dealt with us. Gentleness is not weakness; it is strength of character that flows from a supreme confidence in who God is. Gentleness is not the result of trying harder. It is the result of a humble dependence upon God and a deep satisfaction in Him. To a people that were suffering, to a people who were living in an oppositional world, Peter said to them, "It's going to be okay. It's going to be okay. God is in control and, because God is in control, you can release the death grip on life." The world says you

have to look out for number one. God, because of who He is, says, "I have your back; you can let go of that. You no longer have to worry about that." And as we experience that, and we experience the fullness of God, we will begin to see what a complete waste of time and what an utter waste of energy and how unnecessary it is to cultivate anger, because we have a God that takes care of that, and that's His job. And we can release that to Him. The Lord defends our reputation. I can let go of that.

I began by saying that we live in an angry world. Our world is so angry, so aggressive. But anger also puts on a pretty good mask. It disguises itself pretty well. But I think that, if you'll just stop for a moment and look at the routine ways that the world operates, what typically occurs in workplaces and between families, you'll start to see a root of anger not very far below the surface. Look at people interacting, and you start to find sarcasm. And below the surface of sarcasm, you'll find anger pretty quickly. You find someone that's stuck in a cycle of cynicism and just being judgmental all the time and nothing is ever good enough, there is an anger that is lurking below the surface. The person that is stuck on gossip and putting people in their place, withdrawing from others, manipulating their world, anger is found in each one of these cases. There is a root of anger. And our world runs on anger.

But we have been freed to live differently. The bumper sticker says, "If you're not outraged, you aren't paying attention." And you know what? If you are living without God, I think that probably is a really accurate statement. But, Church, as one of your pastors, let me just say, "Let that not be true of us!" Let it be true of us that we aren't outraged because our eyes are wide open and we see everything that's happening, but we have a God that is so big that we trust Him. Let us not be outraged, because we are alive to God, and we are in a perfectly safe and sufficient place. Let it be said of us that we aren't outraged because we have been freed by God to bless when others curse. We aren't outraged because we have a heart that has become like Jesus' very heart. We aren't outraged because He has freed us to not lash out in anger, but to respond in gentleness and in the strength that He provides. Let that be true of us! We serve; we follow a gentle Savior. And He's the One that we say we want to become like, to become people with hearts of gentleness.

So as we close, I just want to offer two practical steps. The first one, we actually spent the first part of the message talking about. The first one is just to ask yourself this question: "Am I drawn to gentleness? Do I long for a gentle heart? Is that something that's attractive to me?" And if the answer to that question is yes, then I just want to say, "Great!" Hold on for a moment. We'll get to step two. But I also want to say that if, in your heart of hearts, the answer to that question is, "Not really," that's okay. God knows our heart. Let's just be honest about it. And one of the most profound, impactful prayers we could probably make is to say, "God, I just don't…I'm not drawn to it. I don't want that. But I'm willing to have my wants be changed. I'm willing to have You change my *wanter*." Some of us have broken *wanters*. All of us, actually have broken *wanters*. And are we willing to say to God, "Help me want that which I don't want. Help me to see it differently." That could be the first and the only step in pursuing a heart of gentleness.

If gentleness is alluring to you though, I want to return to this idea of what it means to pursue transformation. And the place that we have to start for transformation is always with what our view of God is. You remember that Paul says, "Be transformed," by what? "By the renewing of your mind." And the question that we have to return to is, "When we look at God, do we find our

life with Him sufficiently satisfying? Do we trust Him? Is He good? Is He generous to us? Is He gentle with us? Do we believe that about Him?" Do we look at Him and say, "There is no One more glorious; there is no One more joyous than God. And because He is who He is, I can just let go. I can trust Him." See, lingering in all of us, there are wrong views of God, and the first step in transformation is to come back and have that image be reformed—to have it aligned with who God really is. If we think He's a bad, angry father, then our willingness to run to Him is going to be very low. And so, the place we need to begin is to have our mind renewed afresh on the goodness of God.

So, the first step I'd encourage you to take in terms of having your mind be renewed is just to turn to the Scriptures. Soak your mind in who God is. Read good books that are filled with Scripture. Talk to pastors. Talk to your friends. Talk to Life Group members. Reach out. Talk to a spiritual caregiver. We need our minds to accurately think of who God is in His fullness, that we might be freed up to release our life to Him, that we can be freed of a life and a heart of anger. We serve a gentle Savior, and our world needs gentleness. And we are people that are seeking to become like Him, that His very heart would come to be what our very heart is like. And we pray that God would make it so for the sake of His glory, and for the sake of an angry world. Let's pray together.

Our Father, you are so good. There is no one more joyous; there is no one stronger; there is no one more powerful than You. God, You are love, and we praise You for who You are. And, Jesus, we look at You and we are so thankful that You are our gentle Savior, that we can turn to You over and over again, and You will meet us with open arms, because You are not harsh. You are gentle. And, Lord, we want to become like You. And so, will You build up in us a confidence that You have our life in Your hands, and because You are good, we are safe, that we might release control, that we might release anger to You. Help us to reflect You in the world as we become gentle, just like You, we pray, Amen.

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Spring 2022 // WEEK 5

Life Group Questions

Real Change: Getting to the heart of it. // May 21/22, 2022

A Heart of Gentleness // 1 Peter 3:8-17

Introduction

Welcome to the final week of the Spring Life Group Session. After this week, we will take a break for the summer. Even though groups will not be officially meeting, your Life Group will probably gather several times over the summer socially or maybe you've looked at the **Summer Together Booklet** and picked out something to do together this summer!

Two more things for this final week:

1. If you haven't celebrated with your Party Poppers, take a few moments to do so!

2. The Life Groups Team has a very short survey that we'd love for you to fill out. Please take about 5 minutes **during** your group meeting to tell us how participating in a Life Group has influenced your walk with Jesus. Here is a link to the survey: https://forms.office.com/r/duSTX8uZH0 Or use this QR Code:

Outrage and anger are prevalent in our world today. Not only are they prevalent, but they are somewhat valued; portrayed in a way that shows passion, vibrancy and purpose. That's not all bad, is it? God's Word is clear, we are to set aside anger and pursue gentleness. As we continue the Real Change series, we take a moment to notice the way of gentleness and to (hopefully) find it to be of much higher value than a heart of anger.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over the questions below and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. What are the most important qualities in friends?

2. If you were given a pill that would rid you of anger, would you take it? Why or why not?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
    c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) In what ways did the sermon this week challenge your thoughts on anger and gentleness?

2) Throughout the first letter of Peter, he reminds believers that we should live differently because we are strangers to this world. Christians should remain gentle even when surrounded by anger and persecution. Read 1 Peter 3:15. According to this verse what is one way that Christians can be different in a world filled with anger? How is gentleness involved?

   In the ESV translation, this verse begins by saying *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy*. Do you see gentleness as a way that you can honor Christ? How does this mindset change your interactions with others?

3) Read Matthew 11:28-29 to get a glimpse of Jesus Christ's own heart of gentleness. Take a moment to have everyone in the group contribute their answers to the following questions:

   How does Jesus describe Himself? What does this teach me about who He is?

How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self?

What should I do in response? Perhaps share the Personal Spiritual Exercise (detailed below) you are choosing to participate in this week.

4) Read 1 Peter 3:8-9. What are the potential ways to be gentle that are mentioned in these verses? Make a list. (hint: Peter identifies eight ways to extend gentleness).

How did you experience any of the eight listed ways of gentleness in your life this week? Were you the giver or receiver of gentleness?

Which gesture of gentleness proves to be the most challenging for you right now? How can your life group pray with you in this and be an encouragement to you?

5) It is important to realize that pursuing gentleness does not mean we will no longer experience feelings of anger. In the life of the believer, anger will always be one of the great troubles in this world. Peter reminds us of this by quoting Psalm 34 in his letter as an encouragement. What does it look like to feel anger but respond in gentleness?

Share of a time when you chose to pursue gentleness in a moment when anger seemed more natural. What was the benefit of choosing to be gentle?

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts.

1. **Sitting With God** – solitude and silence; coming to stillness (body, mind, spirit). Spend 15 minutes in silence, processing your thoughts on gentleness and anger. Advance through this exercise in the following way:

   Minutes 1-5: Lift your thoughts *upward* as you praise God for how He is kind in His gentleness. Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30.

   > *Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*

   Minutes 5-10: Turn your thoughts *inward* to identify if gentleness compels you in your relationships. Do you desire to be gentle in your interactions with others? Be honest with yourself and God. Ask Him to help you set aside anger and pursue gentleness.

   Minutes 10-15: Extend your thoughts *outward* to pray for a person or interaction that you would like to move forward with gentleness. Perhaps anger, sarcasm and cynicism have lingered in many of your interactions with others. Pray for wisdom in how to see them the way Christ sees them.

2. **Soaking In The Word** – Engage with Psalm 34 multiple times throughout the week. Read to listen, feel, experience the Words washing over you. Resist study and parsing the psalm. The point is not to gain "head knowledge" but a stirring in the heart as the Holy Spirit brings the Word to life in you.