

Some of you probably remember my kids from when I was on staff here (hard to believe that was 10 years ago)

- We moved to Tulsa in October 2013, so unless you have seen them recently, you probably picture them as the little 4 year old and 3 year old (pic) they were when we moved
- But as you already know, a lot changes in 10 years – Addie confirmation (pic)
 - Eli is 6' tall, in size 14 shoes and starts high school in the Fall
 - Adelyn is less than 6 months away from being a teenager, just completed confirmation and starts 7th grade in the Fall
- When I think back to the 4-year old and 3-year old from that first picture, though, one of my favorite memories is of them reaching up to hold my hand (pic) when we would go for walks
 - I just loved holding their little hands when we walked around the neighborhood or walked around the zoo
 - Every once in a while, they would be a little ornery and they thought it was hilarious to take both of their hands and squeeze my hand as hard as they could
 - Both of their hands combined still couldn't fit around my hand and couldn't hurt me at all, but I would play it up like they were breaking my hand it was hurting so badly
 - Then in return I'd give them a quick little squeeze and kind of squeeze their hands where their bones would move all around – it would freak them out and they thought it was so gross, but so funny
 - If I wasn't careful, though, I could have hurt them badly
 - While they could have squeezed my hand as hard they could and it wouldn't have done anything to me, if I squeezed as hard as I could, I would have broken their hands
 - **I HAD TO BE GENTLE**

Gentleness is the quality of being kind, tender, or mild-mannered

- It's similar to kindness, but involves cultivating a softness of heart toward other people
- A common misconception is that gentleness is weakness or passivity
 - True gentleness is just the opposite – it requires great strength and self-control
 - In thinking about holding my kids hands when they were little – gentleness is a strong hand with a soft touch
 - It's the strong hand that must learn to be gentle, not the weak one
 - Gentleness is a tender, compassionate approach toward others' weaknesses and limitations

- It comes from a state of **humility** – typically, someone who lacks gentleness is often prideful and easily angered or feels the need for revenge
- A gentle heart comes from having **love for others**

The Bible urges followers of Jesus to be gentle.

- Not only is it a **Fruit of the Spirit** we read about in **Galatians 5:22-23**, “*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...*”
- But it is also a **command** in many other passages in the Bible
 - **Proverbs 15:4a** – *A tree gives us fruit, [gentle] words give us life.*
 - **Colossians 3:12** – *Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*
 - **Philippians 4:5** – *Let your gentleness be evident to all.*
 - **Ephesians 4:1-3** – *Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.*
 - **1 Peter 3:13-16** – *Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good?¹⁴ But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don’t worry or be afraid of their threats. ¹⁵ Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. ¹⁶ But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.*

And in the Gospel of **Matthew**, we learn that gentleness is at the core of who Jesus is

In the four gospel accounts given to us, 89 chapters of biblical text, there’s only one place where Jesus tells us about His own heart.

- We learn much in the four Gospels about Jesus’ teaching.
- We read of His birth, His ministry and His disciples.
- We are told of His travels and prayer habits.
- We find lengthy speeches and repeated objections by His hearers, prompting further teaching.
- We learn of the way He understood Himself to fulfill the whole Old Testament.

- And we learn in all four accounts of His unjust arrest and shameful death and astonishing resurrection.
- But in only one place do we hear Jesus Himself open up to us His very heart:

Matthew 11:28-30 – “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

One thing to get straight right from the start is that when the Bible speaks of the **heart (pic)**, it is not speaking of our emotional life only but of the central animating center of all we do.

- The heart, in biblical terms, is not part of who we are but the **center of who we are** – it is what defines and directs us.
- The heart drives all we do.
- When Jesus tells us what animates Him most deeply, what is most true of Him – when He exposes the innermost recesses of His being – what we find there is: **humble** and **gentle**.

The Greek word translated “**gentle (pic)**” here occurs just three other times in the NT:

- In the first beatitude, that “the **meek**” will inherit the earth (**Matt 5:5**)
- In the prophecy in **Matthew 21:5** (quoting **Zechariah 9:9**) that Jesus the king “is coming to you, **humble**, and mounted on a donkey”
- In Peter’s encouragement to wives to nurture more than anything else “the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a **gentle** and quiet spirit (**1 Peter 3:4**)
 - **Meek, humble, gentle**
 - Jesus is not harsh, reactionary, or easily angered
 - He is the most understanding person in the universe.
 - The posture most natural to Him is not a pointed finger but **open arms**

The meaning of the word **humble (pic)** overlaps with that of gentle, together communicating a single reality about Jesus’ heart.

- Typically, throughout the NT this Greek word refers not to humility as a virtue but to humility in the sense of **destitution** or being **thrust downward** by life circumstance.
 - In Mary’s song while pregnant with Jesus, for example, this word is used to speak of the way God exalts those who are “of **humble** estate” (**Luke 1:52**)
 - Paul uses the word when he tells us to “not be haughty, but associate with the **lowly**” (**Romans 12:16**), referring to the socially unimpressive, those who are not the life of the party but rather cause the host to cringe when they show up.
- **The point in saying that Jesus is humble is that He is accessible**
 - For all His glory and holiness, His supreme uniqueness and otherness:
 - **No one in human history has ever been more approachable than Jesus.**

- No prerequisites, no hoops to jump through – the minimum requirement is simply to open yourself up to Him – **invite Him in**

This is what Paul has to say about Jesus' approachability in Philippians:

- **Philippians 2:1-11** – Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? ²Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. ³Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. **Be humble**, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. ⁵**You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.** ⁶Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷Instead, he **gave up his divine privileges**; he **took the humble position of a slave** and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸he **humbled himself in obedience to God** and died a criminal's death on a cross. ⁹Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gentleness is the core of who Jesus is:

- Tender – open – welcoming – accommodating – understanding – willing
- **A strong hand with a soft touch**
- If we are asked to say only one thing about who Jesus is, we would be honoring Jesus' own teaching if our answer is **gentle** and **humble**

As followers of Jesus, we are called to imitate Jesus

- We too should be gentle and humble, obediently following Jesus and loving others with a gentle spirit
- **But gentleness doesn't come naturally – it's hard**
 - We can't just choose to be more gentle – it's a Fruit of the Spirit, which means it's something the Holy Spirit produces in us
 - It's the product or the fruit of surrendering and being connected with Jesus
 - Jesus is approachable – He gets us (He's not out to get us)
 - He loves us and His invitation to us is to come and follow and surrender and invite the Holy Spirit to do a work in us and through us
 - Will you accept Jesus' invitation?
 - It's not just a one-time invitation – but a daily invitation to follow Him and allow ourselves to be transformed by His gentle and humble heart

Close in prayer