

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Meekness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 50:20; Matt. 5:5; 11:29; Rom. 12:3; Gal. 6:1; Phil. 2:2, 3; 1 Pet. 3:4.*

Memory Text: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (*Matthew 5:5, NKJV*).

Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit that seems very much lost in our aggressive, self-centered culture. Because people associate it with weakness, most do not admire others for being meek. Yet, it is what we are called to be.

What is meekness? It's an attitude of humility toward God and gentleness toward people—when we recognize that God is in control and that we can trust Him, even when things don't go the way we would like, which is so often the case (Is it not?). To be meek, one needs confidence, not in oneself but in the Lord.

Although weakness and meekness may look similar, they are not the same. Weakness is due to negative circumstances, such as lack of strength or lack of courage, hardly the words to describe Jesus, who said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (*Matt. 11:29*). Meekness, rather, is the result of a person's conscious choice to trust in God and lean on Him, as opposed to pushing for one's own ways. Thus, meekness arises out of strength, not weakness.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 27.*

Meek and Lowly in Heart

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (*Matt. 11:29*). What is Jesus telling us here? How can being meek and lowly in heart bring rest to our souls?

Meekness is the absolute ceasing to fight for our agenda and believing that God will fight on our behalf for His. Meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God’s goodness and control over the situation. The meek person is not occupied with self (*see Luke 22:42*)—an attitude that’s key to the promise of finding rest for our souls. After all, aren’t our turmoil and agitation so often due to seeking only for ourselves and what we want? In the truest sense, then, a meek person is one who has learned to die to self, and that takes faith, courage, and perseverance, not necessarily traits the world would associate with meekness.

Read Romans 12:3. How is the idea of meekness represented here? In what ways is this the key to being meek?

Ephesians 4:2 is another text that helps us understand what meekness is. Notice how it’s related to Romans 12:3, in that both texts emphasize in their own way why arrogance and selfishness are contrary to the Christian’s walk. After all, why should any Christian be arrogant about anything? Are we not all sinners? Would we all not be doomed to eternal destruction were it not for Jesus? Are we not all utterly dependent upon God for every breath, every heartbeat? Does not every gift and talent we have come from God? What then do we have to be proud about? Nothing! Indeed, considering all that it cost to save us, Christians should be the meekest and humblest folks on earth.

Think about how utterly dependent you are upon God for everything. Where, then, do that pride and arrogance in your heart come from, and how can you get rid of these?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Matthew 11:29*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Reflect on the truth that meekness is likeness to Jesus. It is not cowardice, fear, or weakness.

Feel: Experience the restfulness and assurance that come from enacting Christ's meekness in your life.

Do: Relate with maturity to difficulty and conflict.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Meekness of Christ

A To manifest meekness is to behave in a manner that honors Christ. This requires confidence in God and courage in the face of danger, conflict, and provocation.

1. In what ways does meekness serve to defuse conflict?
2. How is aggressive behavior generally an indication of self-centeredness?

II. Feel: The Deep Sense of Peace That Comes From Behaving Meekly

A How does behaving with meekness in the face of provocation help us to see the foolishness of aggressive behavior?

III. Do: The Promised Inheritance of the Meek Is Life in the Paradise of God

A In what way does the exercise of meekness contribute to Christian maturity?

B How do aggression and self-assertiveness hurt us?

C In what way does meekness bring honor and praise to God?

D In what way is there a definite correlation between meekness in the here and now and meekness in the new earth?

▶ **Summary:** When Christians are confronted with strife or provocation and respond with meekness, they are behaving in a Christlike manner. Meekness is not cowardice. It is the expression of confidence in the lifestyle preparing for heaven. It has the power to diffuse hostility and create peace and harmony. It is an antidote to egotism.

Models of Meekness

Remember the crisis that Abraham faced in deciding with his nephew Lot how to divide up the land? (*See Gen. 13:8, 9.*) In view of the fact that God had promised to make of his descendants a great nation, what might have been Abraham's justification in taking the best for himself? Instead, Abraham allowed Lot to choose first, saying that he would take what was left over. How was this action a characteristic of meekness?

Most everyone knows the story of Joseph being sold as a slave into Egypt by his brothers. Read again the story of their coming to him, now second in command in all Egypt, and begging to be able to purchase food (*Genesis 45*). How did Joseph's meekness determine how he treated his brothers? Had he not been meek, what would he probably have done? How is *Genesis 50:20* an example of the worldview of those who are meek?

As a young man David had been anointed to be the next king of Israel. King Saul became insanely jealous and for years pursued David and his men with the intent to kill him. On two occasions David had an opportunity to kill Saul (*1 Sam. 24:3–7, 26:7–12*). If David had not been meek, what might have been his rationalization for killing Saul? Why is it so easy for us to use a spiritual excuse for doing something that is in our own interest?

In *Numbers 12:3*, Moses is described as the meekest man of his time. Yet, his decisive actions do not seem to fit the popular concept of meekness. His demand to Pharaoh to let Israel go was forceful and followed up with action. When Israel worshiped the golden calf, his "anger burned," and before it was over he had taken the calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, and made the children of Israel drink it (*Exod. 32:19, 20*). How are we to understand the meekness of Moses?

Jesus, of course, is the greatest of all models of meekness (*Matt. 11:29*). What are some of the examples of His meekness? How, for instance, was His meekness revealed in *John 18:21–23*? Or how about *Matthew 26:39*? At the same time, we find examples of Jesus doing things that don't appear to be meek, such as when He drove the money changers out of the temple or all the times He confronted the Pharisees and others regarding their hypocrisy. How do these examples help us understand that meekness can be manifested in some very bold ways?

What can you find in common among these examples of meekness? What can you learn from them that could help you understand what meekness is and isn't?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Christlike meekness comes from a humble dependence on God’s way and is reflected in a gentle, peace-loving treatment of others.

Just for Teachers: Write the word H-U-M-I-L-I-T-Y on the left side of the blackboard. Ask your class members to come up with phrases that define and describe *humility*, each starting with one of the letters in the word.

Discuss the difference between humility and low self-esteem, meekness and weakness. You may write *humility* and *meekness* on one side of the board and *low self-esteem* and *weakness* on the other, and ask your class members to compare and contrast the terms. For example, was Jesus meek during His trial and crucifixion? (See *Matthew 27*.) What did this meekness look and sound like? Did Jesus respond this way because He was weak or had low self-esteem? How would someone who was timid or didn’t value himself or herself respond in similar situations?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: Provide pictures of Bible characters who are models of meekness, such as Jesus (maybe a short video of His birth or trial), Joseph, or Moses, as an introduction to this section of the lesson.

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus, Meek and Lowly (*Review Matthew 11:29 with your class.*)

Jesus’ birth to humble parents in a stable was an indication of the place He was to take among humanity. Because of the unique circumstances of His birth, Jesus would be labeled, to the day He died, as an illegitimate child. The mob around Him at his trial were more than cruel in their insults on this point. His parents were from among the poor working class, as indicated by the less-expensive sacrifice of two young pigeons or turtledoves offered at the temple 40 days after His birth. Jesus Himself would work as a carpenter in a small, insignificant village until He was 30.

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The Importance of Meekness

“Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger” (*Zeph. 2:3, NKJV*). Meekness is the opposite of pride. There is much emphasis today on the importance of having self-esteem. When does self-esteem go over the edge and become pride?

Meekness is necessary for receiving God’s Word. “Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (*James 1:21, NKJV*). A person who does not have a humble spirit cannot receive God’s Word because there is a conflict of interest. Why is this so?

Meekness is necessary for effective witnessing. “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” (*1 Pet. 3:15, NKJV*).

“Our influence upon others depends not so much upon what we say as upon what we are. Men may combat and defy our logic, they may resist our appeals; but a life of disinterested [unselfish] love is an argument they cannot gainsay. A consistent life, characterized by the meekness of Christ, is a power in the world.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

Meekness gives glory to God. First Peter 3:4 says, “even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

“It is right to love beauty and to desire it; but God desires us to love and seek first the highest beauty, that which is imperishable. No outward adorning can compare in value or loveliness with that ‘meek and quiet spirit,’ the ‘fine linen, white and clean’ (Revelation 19:14), which all the holy ones of earth will wear. This apparel will make them beautiful and beloved here, and will hereafter be their badge of admission to the palace of the King. His promise is, ‘They shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.’ Revelation 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 523, 524.

How does putting emphasis on external beauty potentially conflict with the development of the fruit of the Spirit, particularly with the fruit of meekness? As the fruit of meekness grows in you, how should your life be different from what it was before? In the area of meekness, what changes have you seen in your life since you’ve accepted Christ? What attitudes might you be harboring that make it difficult for you to be meek?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Jesus not only identified with the poor and those often insulted because of the circumstances of their birth, but He took on their lot in life. How can anyone ever born on this earth justly claim superiority because rank or class or bloodlines when the King of the universe, who is in every way superior to the highest-born mortal, accepted the lowest position in human circles? Jesus' quiet, meek acceptance of His place gives dignity and hope to everyone, however humble and ignominious their circumstances. His life illustrated the fact that it is God's goodness and His value for us that make each of us of infinite worth.

Consider This: What other examples from Jesus' life illustrate His willingness to identify with the poor, the scorned, and the weak? How do learning about Jesus, the meek and lowly one, and taking on His yoke help us find rest?


II. Joseph: From Slave and Prisoner to Prime Minister *(Review Genesis 37, 39, and 50 with your class.)*

In some ways similar to Jesus, Joseph had once had a favored position as an honored and much-loved son of a wealthy man before he was sold by his brothers to become a slave in a foreign country and from there to become a prisoner. Joseph could have exacted revenge on his brothers if he had wanted to; his meekness certainly was not the result of weakness or low self-esteem. When his brothers came to Egypt seeking grain, Joseph used his position and power to question and test his brothers thoroughly before he gave in to the longing to be reunited with them and with his father. When they expressed sorrow and repentance, however, Joseph responded with all the warmth and passionate love of a brother longing for reconciliation.

Consider This: How did Joseph model true humility? How can we practice the kind of humility that has enough confidence in God's way over the long haul that we can afford to forgo our own short-term plans and comfort? What qualities of meekness did Joseph portray as mentioned in Matthew 18:21, 22; 2 Timothy 2:24, 25; and Galatians 6:1?

III. Moses, the Meekest Man on Earth *(Review Numbers 12, 16, and 20 with your class.)*

When Moses' authority was questioned by his brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, what they really were questioning was God's authority to appoint

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Practicing the Fruit of Meekness

Meekness will be manifested in how we relate to others. That is, it's something that is active, something that will reveal itself in our words, attitudes, and actions. You might think that you are meek, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you are. To be meek is to manifest meekness.

How do the following texts show us how meekness is to be revealed in our lives? Why is meekness so important in these situations?

Matt. 5:39 _____

Matt. 18:21, 22 _____

Gal. 6:1 _____

2 Tim. 2:24, 25 _____

Titus 3:2 _____

Phil. 2:2, 3 _____

As we've been saying all along, meekness is wrongly associated with weakness. It is anything but. In fact, go back over the verses we've looked at today. Can you not see how it takes strength, moral and spiritual strength, to reveal meekness in most of these situations?

Of course, if meekness is a fruit of the Spirit, it's something that comes to us from God and not from ourselves. Nevertheless, we need the daily surrender to the Lord, the daily willingness to obey in faith, in order for meekness to be made manifest in our lives.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Moses as leader of the people. Moses' authority often was questioned not only by his closest family but by other leaders in the camp and the people themselves. However, Moses did not respond with wounded, angry pride over these questions of his right to lead the people. "Their accusations were borne by Moses in uncomplaining silence. . . . Moses 'was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth,' and this is why he was granted divine wisdom and guidance above all others."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 384.

By depending on God to defend him and interceding for Miriam and the rebellious followers of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Moses illustrated the selflessness of one who rests securely in the place God has put him, who seeks only to discharge the duties God has given him, with God's love in his heart that has no need of approbation or honor from others.

Moses was not always meek, however. The young man who lost his temper with the bully in the desert at the beginning of his career was also the man who lost his temper at Meribah with a people he had led for 40 years through the desert to the Promised Land. This was such a serious matter that it kept Moses from entering Canaan. The people of Israel tried God Himself with their complaining and rebellion, but their difficult behavior was no excuse for Moses and Aaron to lose their tempers.

Consider This: What was the difference between Moses' response to the people at Meribah and his previous responses to rebellion? What principles does this illustrate about responding to frustrating situations with anger versus meekness?

IV. Special Need for Humility in the Last Days *(Review Ezekiel 9 with your class.)*

As Ezekiel watches in vision those who are grieving and lamenting about the detestable things being done in Jerusalem, instructions are given to put a mark on them and to destroy all those in the city who do not have the mark, beginning at the sanctuary. Those who are marked because of their lowliness of heart and deep sorrow and humiliation over sin are sealed, hidden safely in God when probation closes. As they draw near to Jesus and keep their eyes fixed upon His perfect purity, they recognize how terrible sin really is. As they search their hearts and humble themselves before God during the closing moments of the great Day of Atonement, He is able to clothe them with Christ's robe of righteousness. "Their contrition and self-abasement are infinitely more acceptable in the sight of God than is the self-sufficient, haughty spirit of those who see no cause to lament, who scorn the humility of

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The Reward of the Meek

E. D. Hulse said, “Humility is a strange thing. The minute you think you’ve got it, you’ve lost it.”

A small town wanted to recognize and reward its meekest citizen. A survey was taken of their small community, which eventually identified the person. In a ceremony attended by all the important people, the meekest citizen was presented with a ribbon on which were inscribed the words, “The Meekest Man in Town.” However, the next day they had to take the ribbon away from him, because he was wearing it!

How do you understand the promises and rewards mentioned in the following texts?

Ps. 22:26 _____

Ps. 25:9 _____

Ps. 37:11 _____

Ps. 147:6 _____

Isa. 29:19 _____

Matt. 5:5 _____

These verses are comforting because there are times when the meek are taken advantage of. But we have learned in this study that a meek person isn’t concerned with lifting himself or herself up before men but rather lifting God up. As a result, God promises to exalt the one who is meek. The rewards can be experienced now and, most surely, in the new heaven and new earth of eternity.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Christ. . . Meekness and lowliness of heart are the conditions for strength and victory.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 475.

Consider This: Why is a meek and humble spirit so crucial in these last days? How important is it to continually seek Christ’s face in humility, to abase ourselves before Him, and to accept His white robe of purity in place of our dirty rags?

► STEP 3—Apply

1 A meek and quiet spirit is a powerful argument for Christ. Why is this so? Discuss examples of the power of humility you have witnessed in others, both in the home and in the workplace.

2 A meek and quiet spirit makes us lovely and beloved here on earth, and those adorned with this spirit will be admitted to the palace of the King of the universe (*see 1 Pet. 3:4*). What are the temptations for external adornment here on earth, and why are we directed toward obtaining the higher beauty of inward adornment?

► STEP 4—Create

1 What aspects of your life have been difficult to bear, in terms of poverty, scorn, and humiliation? What can you learn from the lives of Jesus, Joseph, and Moses about how to handle these situations in the upcoming weeks?

2 Moses made a bronze serpent on a staff, and all who were bitten by poisonous snakes could look on it and be healed. This was a visual prophecy of Christ in His most humiliating office, a cursed object on a cross, lifted up for our healing. What visual might you create of the humility and lowliness of the King of the universe, who suffered and died for you?

3 Consider using calligraphy to write out verses from Ephesians 2 about how we should imitate Christ’s humility in our relationships with others.

Further Study: “Christ is not to be hid away in the heart and locked in as a coveted treasure, sacred and sweet, to be enjoyed solely by the possessor. We are to have Christ in our hearts as a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, refreshing all who come in contact with us. We must confess Christ openly and bravely, *exhibiting in our characters his meekness, humility, and love*, till men shall be charmed by the beauty of holiness. It is not the best way to preserve our religion as we bottle perfumes, lest the fragrance should escape.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 400, emphasis supplied.

“The peace of Christ, the peace of Christ—money cannot buy it, brilliant talent cannot command it, intellect cannot secure it; it is the gift of God. The religion of Christ—how shall I make all understand their great loss if they fail to carry its holy principles into the daily life? *The meekness and lowliness* of Christ is the Christian’s power. It is indeed more precious than all things which genius can create or wealth can buy. Of all things that are sought, cherished, and cultivated, there is nothing so valuable in the sight of God as a pure heart, a disposition imbued with thankfulness and peace.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 403, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ God promises to increase joy in the lives of those who are meek. Why do you think meek people can be joyful? Give several reasons. How will cultivating the fruit of the Spirit that is meekness improve your everyday life?
- ❷ What are ways in which meekness can be misconstrued as weakness?
- ❸ All this talk about meekness raises important questions: are Christians never to stand up for their own rights? Do we allow ourselves to be doormats, constantly stepped on without doing anything in our own defense? Is there a balance here, and, if so, how do we find it?
- ❹ Nietzsche argued that Christianity was a religion born from those who were weak, who didn’t have power, and thus who took traits such as humility and meekness and made them appear like something good, something to strive for. How would you respond to such an argument?