

## The Gentleness of Jesus Matthew 11:28-30

It has become increasingly evident that we live in a culture that promotes aggressiveness. If you want to get ahead, you have to take charge, be assertive and if necessary, bulldoze anyone who stands in your way. Fashion designer Coco Chanel once remarked “gentleness doesn’t get work done unless you happen to be a hen laying eggs.”

Motivational speaker and professor Leo Buscaglia said “If you’re an advocate of gentleness, you’re simplistic and naïve. If you’re an advocate of despair and hate, you’re sophisticated.”

The dictionary defines gentleness as the quality of being kind, tender, or mild-mannered; softness of action or effect. It’s also described as being loving, tender, calm and humble in the things you say and do instead of being harsh or mean. It is a mildness or meekness of spirit.

The Bible refers to it as showing care and respect for others in how you act and speak and is evident in our love, grace, helpfulness, and kindness. But gentleness in no way overlooks or tolerates things that are wrong. Jesus was the gentlest person ever and yet at appropriate times He spoke truth in love to the Pharisees by rebuking them. He did not tolerate how the religious leaders had degraded the Temple by allowing it to become a money grabbing market exploiting worshippers and used whips to drive them out.

From a Biblical perspective, gentleness has been defined as “strength under control, the ability to stay calm, no matter what happens.” Sometimes it’s translated meekness.

Saint Frances de Sales has said that “Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength.”

To support the idea of strength under control Leo Rosten said that he “learned that it is the weak who are cruel, and that gentleness is to be expected only from the strong.”

In the novel Jane Eyre, one of the characters, Charlotte Brontë states “Oh! that gentleness! How far more potent is it than force!”

Max Lucado writes: “I choose gentleness... Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice, may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.”

Considering how the world views gentleness, the world would argue that it is a sign of weakness and claim that you can’t get anywhere by being gentle. When speaking about foreign policy, Teddy Roosevelt is noted for saying that we should “speak softly but carry a big stick.” But Jesus had a different view about gentleness in how He taught, how He lived, and even in how He responded to those who were antagonistic toward Him.

Turn to **Matthew 11:28-30** where we see the gentleness of Jesus. Notice first, that Jesus is gentle in His plea to us.

### I. JESUS IS GENTLE IN HIS PLEA TO US

Jesus begins by giving a clear invitation.

#### A. Jesus Gives a Clear Invitation – v. 28a “Come to Me.”

Jesus extends an invitation when He says “come”. Among its many definitions in the dictionary, it refers to moving from one place to another.

If someone is across the room and you want to speak to them without shouting, you tell that person to come here so you can have a word with them.

If you want to invite someone over for dinner, you call them up and tell them you would like them to come to your home at 6 for a meal.

If your boss needs you, he or she may call you on the phone and ask you to come to their office to discuss an important matter related to business. In those instances, you are moving from where you are to where the other person is. It’s an invitation that speaks of physical movement on your part to go to where the other person is.

It can also refer to entering into a certain state or

condition. For example, you hear what someone says, and you come to the conclusion that a change in your thinking is required by agreeing with the position a person is proposing. In that case, I might say that I have come to my senses.

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus said that He is **“the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one can come to the Father except by Me.” (John 14:6)**

In the context of our passage, there are two invitations that are extended. We can't skip over one in order to do the other. The first invitation He gives is to come to Him for salvation. The second invitation He gives is to come and learn from Him.

The plea from Jesus is to come to Him because He is the only way that we can have eternal life. In how it is used here, the word also implies trust or belief. Considering all the other options there is only one real source that can satisfy the wondering and wandering heart with what is eternal.

### **John 3:16**

Coming to Jesus means trusting Him. John MacArthur suggests that to come is to believe to the point of submitting to His lordship.

**John 6:35 “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.’”**

In **John 6:35**, the words come and believe are parallel to hunger and thirst. Coming to Him is believing in Him. This doesn't mean we physically come to Jesus, but rather coming to Him in trust or belief. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, He offered to her living water and said that if a person drinks from what He provides would never be thirsty again. This living water gives eternal life. **(John 4:10, 13-14)**

When Jesus called the disciples, He said **“come, follow Me.”** In this case it was both an invitation to physically move where they were at and literally follow Him as well as an invitation to believe in Him, to trust that He was the long-awaited Messiah. That's what happened when Peter, Andrew, James and John left their fishing boats to follow Christ.

Matthew did the same when he left his tax business. In these instances, they literally left where they were to where Christ was in order to follow Him as disciples. It was an outward demonstration of their inward belief and trust in Him as Messiah.

That same invitation to come in belief of Him and be His devoted disciples is seen in **Luke 9:23 “Then He said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.’”**

Notice that in each of these instances, the call was not forced or coercive. It was a gentle call. The invitation is clear that we are to follow Him, and Him alone. **“Come, follow Me.”** In that invitation there is to be no wavering, no second-guessing, no indecisiveness. It is an invitation that requires full commitment, one that completely and exclusively trusts in Him alone.

Jesus give a clear invitation.

He also gives a compelling invitation.

### **B. Jesus Gives a Compelling Invitation – v. 28b “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened.”**

The KJV says **“you that labor and are heavy laden.”**

This is the why of His invitation. **Why should we come to Him?**

In John Bunyan's classic tale, Pilgrim's Progress, he accurately depicts the idea of the burden of sin we carry by describing Christian as carrying a large backpack that weighs him down. Try as he may, Christian cannot rid himself of his burden. As he continues his journey, it becomes an even heavier weight. It is only when he comes to the cross and believes in Christ's sacrifice that the burden rolls off his back and he is free.

The phrase **“all who are”** indicates a pre-existing condition, it's our current situation. Without Christ we are and have been burdened by sin. The word **“weary”** means working to the point of exhaustion. Its tense indicates extreme toil in trying to get rid of sin on our own to please God, something that we

can never do even though we continue to try.

The term **“heavy laden or burdened”** speaks of something that was dumped on us in the past. In **Psalm 51:5** David says we were born sinners. Paul says there is no one who is righteous (**Romans 3:10**), and we all inherited that burden of sin from Adam (**Romans 5:12**). David would write in **Psalm 38:4** that the burden of sin **“overwhelmed him like a burden too heavy to bear.”**

John MacArthur writes: *“whereas weary refers to the internal exhaustion caused by seeking divine truth through human wisdom, heavy-laden suggests the external burdens caused by the futile efforts of works righteousness.”*

And Jesus says **“if you’re tired of trying to remove the burden of sin on your own, come to Me and I’ll take care of it. As a matter of fact, I’ll carry it for you.”**

One of our great hymns asks us to consider the burden of sin that we carry and then responds with the only proven way to rid us of that burden.

Would you be free from the burden of sin?  
There’s pow’r in the blood, pow’r in the blood;  
Would you o’er evil a victory win?  
There’s wonderful pow’r in the blood.

Would you be free from your passion and pride?  
There’s pow’r in the blood, pow’r in the blood;  
Come for a cleansing to Calvary’s tide;  
There’s wonderful pow’r in the blood.

Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow?  
There’s pow’r in the blood, pow’r in the blood;  
Sin-stains are lost in its life-giving flow;  
There’s wonderful pow’r in the blood.

There is pow’r, pow’r, wonder-working pow’r  
In the blood of the Lamb;  
There is pow’r, pow’r, wonder-working pow’r  
In the precious blood of the Lamb.

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**Have you ever felt weary by the sins you carry?  
Do you feel burdened, weighed down from the load?**

**Is it too much for you to bear alone?**

**Have you tried all kinds of things to rid yourself of the load but can’t get rid of it?**

All other religions require their adherents to carry their own sin load by following religious rites, sacrifices, prayers, rules, regulations and ceremonies. Jesus says **“Come to Me.”**

The invitation by Jesus is compelling because everyone of us is loaded down with sin, everyone of us is shackled by a heavy burden and Jesus says come and I’ll take the load off you.

Bill Gaither sings:

Shackled by a heavy burden  
'Neath a load of guilt and shame  
Then the hand of Jesus touched me  
And now I am no longer the same.  
He touched me, oh, He touched me  
And oh, the joy that floods my soul  
Something happened, and now I know  
He touched me, and made me whole.

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Jesus has a reason to invite all who are weary and burdened by sin to come to Him. His invitation is not only clear and compelling, it is also a continuous invitation.

### **C. Jesus Gives a Continuous Invitation – vv. 28-30**

Jesus offers rest to us by inviting us to come and put our sin burdens on Him and so enjoy His forgiveness and gift of eternal life. The picture Jesus gives is to be yoked to Him. We can’t get eternal life any other way than to be attached to Him.

His audience was familiar with His word picture. They all had seen two oxen pulling a plow. In that day, a farmer would hitch up an older, experienced ox with one that was younger and inexperienced. The older ox was the one pulling all the weight while the younger followed along and learned from the other. Jesus is saying that He will carry all the weight of sin so that we only have to follow Him. He took that burden we carry to the cross and bore it for us.

Jesus says come to Me and I will give you rest. That word literally means “I will rest you.” I will give you rest now and forever. It’s continuous rest from your sin burden every day.

**Romans 8:1 “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

The rest He gives will never change and it’s open to everyone. If you have trusted Christ as your Savior, at the moment of your salvation and for eternity you will be at rest in Christ from your burden of sin.

If you have not yet trusted Christ as your Savior, you can right now experience rest from the toil of your own efforts to try and rid yourself of that sin burden by coming to Him and giving Him your burden.

Would you be free from the burden of sin?  
There’s pow’r in the blood, pow’r in the blood;

Jesus is first gentle in His plea to us to come.  
Next, Jesus is gentle in His provision for us.

## II. JESUS IS GENTLE IN HIS PROVISION FOR US – Psalm 23:1-3

To me there is no greater example of the gentleness of Jesus than in His depiction of being our shepherd and perhaps no clearer passage than **Psalm 23** to convey that truth.

**Isaiah 40:11 “He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young.”**

Last week we saw that **“He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.” (Psalm 103:10)** He doesn’t say come and let Me give you what you deserve, come here so I can bring rightful judgment. No, instead He says come to Me so I can give you rest. We see in both **Psalm 23** and as well in **John 10**, the tenderness and the gentleness of the Good Shepherd who always has the best interest of His sheep.

Sometimes I will use **Psalm 23** for a funeral message to show how in His gentleness He both cares and comforts His sheep. Many people know it by heart but have never really plumbed the riches of what it says about how gentle the Shepherd is.

In **v. 1** we see that the Shepherd gives repeatedly.

### A. The Shepherd Gives Repeatedly – v. 1

The writer begins with the assumption that the Shepherd is the Lord. He also speaks of the personal relationship he has with the shepherd. This isn’t just an acquaintance, this relationship is intimate, one that is built on absolute trust in the care of the Shepherd. He has learned from experience that he can trust and depend on the Shepherd for everything to sustain him. The author says the Shepherd gives so that he lacks nothing. The intent is that the Shepherd gives again and again all that the sheep needs. He lacks no good thing. It also implies that the Shepherd will be faithful to do His part, but he had to stay close to the Shepherd.

Everyday life is filled with choices. We can choose to go our own way and try it on our own, carry our own burdens or we can choose to stay close to the Shepherd knowing that He has our best interest in mind. It’s clear from the passage that he has chosen to follow the Shepherd because he knows there won’t be anything that he lacks from the good hand of the Shepherd. When it says he doesn’t lack for anything, that doesn’t mean that the Shepherd gives him whatever he asks. The Shepherd gives what is best. **Psalm 37:4 “delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart”** isn’t a candy store where we can go in and get whatever we want. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, we desire what He wants for us, knowing it is best and He gives it repeatedly.

Second, the Shepherd gives rest.

### B. The Shepherd Gives Rest – v. 2

Picture with me the shepherd leading his sheep to a grassy meadow. He carefully and deliberately picks his way along a path to a place where his sheep can receive the rest they need. He does this repeatedly, day after day. He tenderly leads them because he knows how frail they are and in need of rest.

**Verse 2** speaks of leading them to green pastures. That is the place they will receive the right nourishment. Their health required that pastures be

green and luscious. This shepherd brings them to green pastures where they could rest. It is where He makes them lie down to rest. Sheep won't lie down if they have needs. They won't rest if they aren't content. If they are afraid, they won't rest. He gives them a sense of peace because that allows them to be at ease from any fears.

We have received an invitation from the Good Shepherd to carry our sin burden and ease our fears about eternity. This shepherd wants to give us rest and invites to come and follow Him to green pastures where we will be given rest under His care. It is something He gives repeatedly.

The shepherd also leads beside quiet waters. Sheep will not drink from moving water so the shepherd builds a place for it to pool so they can drink.

We have received an invitation from Jesus to come to the waters of life to drink freely and so receive peace and rest for our eternal soul, waters that will never run dry, spiritual rest from sin. He is the only source of living water where we can experience eternal rest. He never drives or forces sheep to come to Him but instead gently leads to that place of rest. If we follow the Shepherd, He will give us rest.

Third, the Shepherd gives us restoration.

### C. The Shepherd Gives Restoration – v. 3

We are all broken by sin that has severed our relationship with God. By carrying our burden of sin to the cross, the Good Shepherd made it possible to restore that broken relationship.

Some people like to restore old furniture.

Some people like to restore old cars.

Some people like to restore old homes.

The Shepherd says He wants to restore our soul. He does so by leading along paths of righteousness.

Through His Son, Jesus, God has given us the opportunity to restore our soul through faith in Him. Faith puts us back in our former condition. He leads us along paths that are right and in our following, He restores us.

The Shepherd provides what we lack, and He does so gently by giving repeatedly, by giving rest, by giving restoration.

**Are you weary and burdened?** He gently invites you to follow Him so that He can provide what you need.

Jesus is gentle in His plea to us.

Jesus is gentle in His provision for us.

Jesus is gentle in His Promise to us.

### III. JESUS IS GENTLE IN HIS PROMISE TO US – vv. 4-6

There are days and circumstances in which we may feel all alone and wonder what to do. We may even feel abandoned. Hanging on the cross, Jesus cried out in agony to the Father wondering why He had been forsaken. Yet even in the silence of heaven Jesus knew the reality of the Father's presence even in that moment of utter despair and that's why He could also say **"it is finished."** That's why it's important for us to remember His gentle promise as we see in v. 4 that the Shepherd gives reassurance.

#### A. The Shepherd Gives Reassurance – v. 4

The shadow of death looms over every one of us. We never know the day or time when it will happen that we draw our last breath. We may think it's sooner than it is for others, yet none of us can be sure of that. Someone dies at a young age, and we might hear some say that they were too young or that they went before their time or they still had a lot to live for. While about others we might say that the person lived a good long life. The truth is none of us knows the time the Lord has allotted us here on earth. But the comforting promise is that the Shepherd is there with us every step of our lives if we choose to put our trust in Him and follow where He leads. He is the One who has led us to green pastures and to still waters and He is the One who will lead us through the valley of the shadow of death so that we have nothing to fear.

If I lead the way, I am certain to become fearful and filled with dismay and hopelessness, but because Jesus the Good Shepherd, has gone before us there

is nothing for us to fear. He's been there. And so we can rightly say with Paul **"O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?...Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** (I Corinthians 15:55, 57)

If we are following this Shepherd, He reassures us that there is nothing to be afraid of, not even the shadows of death because He is with us every step of the way. He will never abandon us (Heb. 13:5). That should be reassuring to a troubled mind.

**Isaiah 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."**

**If the Lord will lead us to pleasant places, why do we think He would abandon us in the gloomy places?** When it comes to following the Shepherd through the valley of the shadow of death, we know that He will gently lead us even there. We need to trust Him, He will never take us down a wrong path.

Next, the gentle promise is that the Shepherd gives us refreshment.

### **B. The Shepherd Gives Us Refreshment – v. 5**

It is no secret that I like to eat, but sometimes I don't always eat what is healthy for me. The shepherd knows what is best for the sheep to eat so before they could enter a field, he would have to remove any potentially harmful plants that would cause the sheep to get sick. Only then would they be allowed into the pasture to eat.

Notice though, that the verse says they eat with their enemies around them. Sheep are naturally fearful. For them to eat in the presence of their enemies means that the shepherd has been able to remove those fears. The enemy may still be around, but the presence of the Shepherd reassures the sheep that there is nothing to fear, allowing them to eat in peace.

And when they would get some parasite or sustain some injury, the shepherd would gently tend to the wound with his healing oil and tender care.

In the same way our Good Shepherd bids us to come and dine at His table, to dine free from the worries of anything that would otherwise create fear. Be reassured by the promise of His presence.

Then in **verse 6**, we notice that He gives us the promise of residence.

### **C. The Shepherd Gives Us Residence – v. 6**

Dorothy in Wizard of Oz said it best. **"There's no place like home."** I like taking trips and getting away, but there is nothing like pulling into the driveway at home after being gone for a while. Maybe you feel the same way. It's nice to travel and go places, but there really is no place like home.

By following the Shepherd, He gives us the assurance that we will dwell in His presence forever where we will experience eternal rest. I find it remarkable that God wants us to be with Him. That's how much God loves us. As a result of that great love, His Son, Jesus, has been busy preparing a home for those who follow Him. This is a promise that He has made to everyone who believes that He is the only way as they trust Him as Savior.

Forever is a long time and it's yours and mine and if we follow the Shepherd, He will give us a fulfilling and satisfying life both now and forever. He gently leads us because He has made a promise that He will keep.

Jesus is that gentle Shepherd and gives us an example of gentleness in how He treats us. We see it in how He treated the woman at the well, in how He treated the woman caught in adultery, and in how He treated Peter after his denial at the trial. He treats us with the same gentleness. In the example Jesus gives to us, we are then to extend that same gentleness to others. **So how are we to display this Christ-like characteristic?** Consider lastly that Jesus is gentle in His power through us.

## **IV. JESUS IS GENTLE IN HIS POWER THROUGH US**

Someone rightly said that **"the gentleness of Christ**

is the most beautiful ornament that a Christian can wear.”

While the world tells us to be assertive, the Word tells us to be gentle, but we are not forced to imitate His gentleness. As we have noted in the other character traits of Jesus, gentleness is not something that we have a natural disposition for. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit, and it must begin with Him. If we want to be gentle like Jesus then we must first consider our relationship with Him.

### A. Our Relationship with Him

We have been talking about the invitation Jesus has given us to come to Him and about the Shepherd encouraging us to follow Him. When we choose by faith to follow Him, we are given the Holy Spirit who works to transform us into the likeness of Christ and that includes gentleness.

**Galatians 5:22-23** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Remember that earlier we said that gentleness is power under control. Gentleness and self-control go together, and it stems from all the other fruit combined and coordinated beginning with love. If we are not loving, then we will not be gentle. If we would have self-control, we must be gentle. It can only be produced in us by the Holy Spirit through our relationship with Christ.

When we allow His Spirit to work in us, then we will see His work through us in our responsibility.

### B. Our Responsibility Through Him

While gentleness is something the Holy Spirit develops in us, Scripture also tells us it is a character trait we are to pursue.

**Colossians 3:12** “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

**I Timothy 6:11** “But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.”

**Are we known for our gentleness?** It is to be a trait that is evident in us if we are allowing the power of the Holy Spirit to work through us. It’s our responsibility to yield to Him.

Finally, consider our response by Him.

### C. Our Response By Him

Ellen White writes “A Christian reveals true humility by showing the gentleness of Christ, by being always ready to help others, by speaking kind words and performing unselfish acts, which elevate and ennoble the most sacred message that has come to our world.”

**Are we known for our gentleness with others, or do we tend to be harsh and mean?**

**Proverbs 15:1** “A soft/gentle answer turns away wrath.”

**Ephesians 4:2** “Be completely humble and gentle.”

Just as love and gentleness go together and as gentleness and self-control go together, so gentleness goes together with humility.

**Philippians 4:5** “Let your gentleness be evident to all.”

As we talk to people, whether it is to speak about the gospel or if it is to confront someone about sin, **I Peter 3:15-16** along with **Galatians 6:1** tells us to speak with gentleness. Only through the power of the Spirit that is in us can we respond in gentleness.

Scripture is clear that our gentleness gives us a platform on which to share the gospel and to share it gently. Let others see the gentleness of Christ in us.

This week we will be challenged to exhibit the character of Jesus. He gives us the model of what it is like to be gentle as He invites us to come to Him. Let’s exhibit His gentleness to others that they too might accept His invitation to come with their burdens so that they can experience His eternal rest.