

The Journey of Transformation Raymond L. Fox

Something to reflect on, comment on, and even practice on your journey.



The Gentle Healer Who Turned Over the Tables

In our pursuit of transformation in our Father's image, the practice of gentleness can be a little confusing. Gentleness begins as an attitude of our hearts that views people with tenderness, humility, and compassion. Our desire is to heal and restore, never to injure or damage. Then, in practice, gentleness treats others with patience and calm, without aggression or severity.

Jesus, the gentle healer, is our example. He invited his followers to "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" (Matthew 11:28). But there were some moments when Jesus may not have seemed so gentle. Consider an apparent contrast in the behavior of Jesus that Matthew records in chapter twenty-one of his gospel.

When Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem shortly before his crucifixion, he did not fit the image most people had of a powerful, victorious king, entering a conquered city riding a white stallion at the head of legions of soldiers. He rode on the back of a donkey's colt. Nonetheless, large crowds of people excitedly and joyfully honored him. Matthew explains that the scene fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah who said, "See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Matthew 21:5).

But then a short time later he entered the temple in Jerusalem, finding a confusing cacophony of people and animals. Temple agents were haggling with people, exchanging currencies and selling sheep, cattle, and doves for temple sacrifices during the Passover. Filled with the highest respect for the holiness of his Father's house and the desire to protect it from defilement, Jesus drove the animals from the temple, overturning the tables of the money changers, and declaring, "It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' and you have made it a 'den of robbers'" (Matthew 21:13).

Was his behavior on this occasion inconsistent with his gentle treatment of people in other moments? We might ask this question if we mistakenly think that the choice to be gentle is a choice between only two alternatives: be gentle or not be gentle. In reality, practicing gentleness requires us to think carefully about what the most gentle, least severe response is for each situation.

Jesus understood that he could not stop the abuse of the religious authorities by going from person to person and quietly ask them to stop what they were doing. He could not carefully lead each animal out of the temple, one by one. Jesus' response was the most gentle way to accomplish his righteous purpose. His actions astonished people for the very reason that his behavior, even though appropriate, was so different from his normal way of treating people.

A quiet, calm voice is not effective when a child is about to run out into the street in front of an approaching car. On the other hand, the parent, who yells at the child to stop, need not berate and ridicule the child afterwards. The purpose of gentleness is to heal. There is no need to heap more hurt on a frightened, panicked child who realizes she has just narrowly escaped being run over by a car.

Imagine a master craftsman building a fine piece of furniture. In the process of working the wood, there will be moments when he uses coarser grades of sandpaper to smooth the finish of the wood and other moments when the material requires only the lightest touch of the finest grade of sandpaper. No matter the stage of the work, the craftsman will always use the minimal amount of pressure necessary, the most gentle of touches, even when using the coarser sandpaper, to smooth and finish instead of harming and destroying.

Remember, our purpose is to repair, heal, and restore. Pray for wisdom to understand the appropriate form of gentleness that provides the minimum touch required to produce a beautiful result.

About Raymond

Raymond L. Fox has been teaching about transformation in the image of Jesus for forty-five years, in the U.S. and abroad. He has written four books: *Love God, Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength*, *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*, *The Transformed Church*, and *The Fruit of the Spirit*. His work also includes character counseling and mentoring in juvenile detention facilities. He has degrees in philosophy and education.



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