Closing the Gentleness Gap

The next time you head out the door, try something different and take note of what you see in everyday interactions between the people you encounter that day in your community. Are you seeing an exchange of mutual love and respect, or something very different?

Evidently most Americans are seeing something vastly different. The 2026 Dignity Barometer conducted by Hart Research Associates in February of this year found that although 94% of Americans say all people deserve to be treated with dignity, only 31% believe we actually do treat each other with dignity — an enormous "gentleness" gap in our dealings one with another. No wonder people are pining, aching to find someone who really does care, someone who truly appreciates us for who we are and not what they think we should be. Surely as a nation and as God's children we can do better.

The harshness of worldly judgments is everywhere on display. A popular formula for headlines is "why you're doing it wrong." The assumption is that someone else has all the answers, and therefore you must be clueless. Whatever ideas you may have had on your own on the subject can't be right, because apparently you didn't blindly receive them from the pre-approved consensus. We're constantly told that we're reactionary, regressive, hopelessly out of touch and out of sync. How easy it is to become despondent in a world that would dictate not only our every move, but even our every thought.

In this lonely world of aggression, antagonism, and aggravation, Jesus Christ provides the element that seems to be everywhere missing: gentleness. To even dare to speak that word today arrests people's attention, because it is so uncharacteristic of our times. Yet in God's playbook, gentleness has never gone out of style.

Do you know what words Jesus Christ used to describe himself, to tell people about his own great, big, beautiful heart? Listen to

> Matthew 11:29 (BSB):
> 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.

"I am gentle and humble in heart." Oh please, give me more of that! I so want to have someone in my life who will be gentle with me, someone who'll respect me, someone whose focus is on others and not self, someone who's not competing with me, but who truly desires to lift me up and honor me as if my life really mattered. What a relief, what a refreshing that would be if I could find such a person.

That person is the Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. But it doesn't stop with him. The Book of Colossians says that the Christian believer has Christ in him or her, the hope of glory. As a Christian I can be that gentle person whose presence brings a respite to everyone with whom I come in contact.

The Apostle Paul speaks of how we should emulate Christ in his gentleness:

> 2 Corinthians 10:1 (ESV):
> I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—

Christ modeled gentleness for us; now, we are to go out and live it. One of the reasons Jesus Christ was a breath of fresh air wherever he went is that he didn't judge people. That's right, his motivation was never to coerce, but instead to persuade. He saw beyond the sin nature, and his caring gaze penetrated to be able to see a truly repentant heart. He gave people a fresh start when all others were ready to condemn and banish. He saw people as God sees them — gently calling the still-beloved wayward back to the fold.

The examples of his mercy and compassion to the sinner are seen throughout the Gospels. To the woman caught in adultery, he asked "Woman, where are those thine accusers? Has no one condemned thee?" When she responded, "No man, Lord," his reply was "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." To the woman at the well who had had five husbands, he personally revealed to her that he was the Messiah so that she could believe. In the parable of the prodigal son, he illustrated the redemptive power of a father's love and forgiveness for his disobedient family.

We learn in the New Testament that gentleness is a fruit of the spirit, inherent in the gift of holy spirit to everyone born again.

> Galatians 5:22,23 (ESV):
> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
>
> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

With gentleness comes self-control. The Epistles further instruct us that gentleness is something we can put on, just like we might don a raincoat to head out into the rain.

> Colossians 3:12 (BSB):
> Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with hearts of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Gentleness brings so many good things with it! Hearts of compassion, kindness, humility, and patience, to name a few. What a harbinger of peace we can be when we go forth with gentleness!

When out in the community about to depart after a short encounter with a stranger, my habit has been to say, "Have a blessed day." Lately, I've taken to saying instead, "Have a gentle day." You can almost see the wheels turning in their head when gentleness is introduced into

the conversation: “Just what would a gentle day look like? I’m not sure I know, but I think I want to find out, because that gentleman seems to me like a genuinely gentle man.”

Determine now to show the world, not harshness and hostility, but the gentleness of Christ. Take the time to acquaint yourself with our Savior’s example of gentleness and put it into practice in your own heart and life. And relish the opportunity! You will be a blessing wherever you go, and your life will be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.