

Gentleness

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[0 : 00] I'd like to thank Corey and all of you for your warm welcome today. As I said in the morning, it's a real privilege and pleasure to be with you. And I want to bring you the greetings of the congregation in Carloway.

As I said in the morning, we are so excited at all the work that has been done by the congregations in Edinburgh and in the surrounding district. So we thank God for all that he's doing through you, and we bring you our best wishes and our warm greetings.

So thank you for your warm welcome. And it's been great to be together with you today. You are in the middle of a study on the fruit of the Spirit, which we are going to continue tonight.

So please turn to Galatians chapter 5. And we will look at verses 22 and 23, where these nine elements of the fruit of the Spirit are listed.

Galatians chapter 5 is on page 975, and the words are on the screen above you there. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[1 : 11] Against such things, there is no law. And as you have seen from the Order of Service, and as we've mentioned tonight, we're focusing on gentleness.

As we come to look at these elements that are identified as the fruit of the Spirit, it's important to remember that this list describes two great aspects of the reality of being a Christian.

First of all, that list there is the effect of having God, the Holy Spirit, dwelling in your heart. When you become a Christian, God himself comes and dwells in your heart.

And that has an effect. It changes you and makes a difference in your life, and this is the change that it brings. So being a Christian is not just something that you keep on the inside that's just totally private and totally hidden.

It has an outward effect. But alongside that, that list there is also the evidence of having God, the Holy Spirit, dwelling in your heart.

[2 : 21] It's very simple. How do you know that an apple tree is an apple tree? It's got apples on it. How do you know a Christian is a Christian? They've got that on them.

It's the outward evidence of being a follower of Jesus. So it's good to bear that in mind, effect and evidence simultaneously.

Paul's great message. Paul, one of the early Christian leaders who wrote this letter to the church in Galatia, his great emphasis throughout the letter, and in this part in particular, is that as Christians we have been liberated from a bondage and a slavery that we faced under God's law.

God's law was like a shadow hanging over people that they couldn't fulfill and that ultimately just highlighted their sinfulness. And Paul's great message was that you're not a slave to that law anymore.

You're free. That's the big theme of Galatians. But in chapter 5, he makes a really important point that that freedom is not an opportunity to just do what you like.

[3 : 34] It's not an opportunity for the flesh, is the language that Paul uses, which basically means not an opportunity for the kind of corrupt, sinful nature that we have to just have a field day.

It's not an opportunity for the flesh. It is an opportunity to bear beautiful fruit, to live a different life. So if the whole world is going that way, we're going that way.

We are following Jesus. We are different. And that difference manifests itself in nine ways, and they're listed there as the fruit of the Spirit.

You've been studying them one by one. Tonight, we're looking at gentleness, highlighting the fact that as Christians, we should be characterised by gentleness.

This was the first question to ask us, well, what exactly do we mean by gentleness? And really, we mustn't make it any more complicated than it is. Gentleness or meekness, as it's sometimes

described, is really expressing that mild, impertious, considerate disposition that we should have. [4 : 44] It manifests itself in a friendliness towards other people, an attitude that accommodates to other people's weaknesses and needs. Sometimes it's good to understand these things in terms of their opposite.

And gentleness is basically the opposite of being harsh. And that's a key part of showing love to one another.

Love is shown through a spirit of gentleness. Tonight I want us to initially look at two things. I want to look at God's gentleness and then our gentleness.

And then I want us to focus on a specific issue that gets highlighted throughout the New Testament. But we'll come to that shortly. First of all, I just want to think about God's gentleness, because when we look at that list of the fruit of the Spirit there, we must first of all remember that this verse is primarily teaching us something about God, because the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of God.

It's telling us what God is like. And that's a really important thing to remember, because what's the first things that come to your mind when you think of God? When you think of God's attributes, you think, well, He's powerful.

[5 : 57] He's wise. He's holy. He's righteous. And yes, He's all these things, we stand before God and we're amazed at His majesty, His glory, His greatness, His splendor.

You look at the vastness of the universe, it's just in the palm of His hands. And when we think of the attributes of God, we tend to think of big, big stuff, and that's great. It's really good. We are being reminded of an equally precious truth, that God is gentle.

And there's loads of examples of that in the Bible. Way back in the Old Testament, Samuel, who was a great leader and teacher and spoke expression for God, when he was just a little boy, God gently spoke to him in the night.

Later on in the Old Testament, there was another great leader called Elijah, who had lots of amazing experiences. He had one experience where he was in the wilderness and he saw an earthquake and he saw fire and he saw wind, all sorts of really powerful things, the kind of places where you would expect to see God speaking.

And yet God didn't speak in any of those things, God spoke in a low whisper, in a gentle voice to Elijah.

[7 : 18] And the greatest demonstration of all is in God the Son Himself, Jesus Christ. And you read through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the Bible, you will see many, many examples of the amazing gentleness of Jesus.

You could go, for example, to Luke chapter 7, where a woman came to Jesus and started anointing his feet with a very expensive perfume and she was a woman whose life was in a mess and the people around were saying, if Jesus knew what that woman was like, he would tell her to get lost. And yet Jesus spoke so gently and tenderly to her, he says, your sins are forgiven, your faith has saved you, go in peace. Another example is the very beginning of Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus was confronted by somebody with leprosy, a horrible contagious skin disease that made somebody, you know, that meant people had to just be isolated from everybody else.

This leper came to Jesus and says, please, kneel before him, if you will, you will make me clean. Jesus was moved with pity, stretched out his hand, he says, I'm willing, be clean.

And then perhaps I think maybe the most amazing example of all is at the end of John chapter 21, when Peter, who was one of the main leaders, if you like, of Jesus's disciples, had failed spectacularly as a disciple.

[9 : 03] He had denied Jesus three times, says, I don't know the guy, and Jesus came to him and did he hammer him, did he rebuke him, did he shed him?

No, he gently took him aside and restored him. So Jesus meets a notorious sinner, he meets a social outcast, he meets a failed Christian who has denied his Savior, and with each one of them, Jesus is gentle.

And that I suppose shouldn't surprise us when we come back to the passage that Corey read for us. When Jesus says, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, take my yoke upon you.

Yoke is the idea of like the harness that gets put on an ox, like a kind of burden. He says, take my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Never forget that when you read in the Bible, the big words are important, but the we words are really important too, and there's a really important we word right in the middle of that. That's the word for.

[10 : 20] It's the word that could also really be translated because, because it's introducing a reason, introducing a cause. And basically it's saying, Jesus is saying, come to me, because I am gentle.

And it is so important that we grasp that, because all too often we are held back from God out of fear regarding how he will react.

And that can be even through of us as Christians, not just people who aren't Christians, but people who are Christians. We can be afraid of how God is going to react, especially when it becomes, when it comes to confessing our sins.

Confessing our sins are really, really important part of our Christian walk. Every day we should be confessing our sins to God. The Bible even tells us that we should be confessing our sins to one another. That's something that we should be doing.

Maybe it's not something that we're that good at doing. But sometimes we can be very reluctant to do that because we are afraid that God is going to be angry or disappointed or frustrated because we have mucked up.

[11 : 31] And I've found myself in life thinking, well, I don't really want to talk to God about this, because I've just, you know, I'm wrong. He knows I'm wrong, and it's just best to just keep away.

And yet all the time the truth is that God is not going to be angry or disappointed or frustrated. God is going to be gentle with all who come to him.

And that's why confession of sin is such a healthy thing. It's such a beneficial thing and such a good thing. Because all we're doing is acknowledging to God what he already knows. We're just saying the same thing that he's saying because he knows, and we are simply acknowledging that by confessing our sins to them.

We are showing him that we're sorry, and we are showing him that we need his help. Now, that doesn't mean that God doesn't treat sin seriously. That's not what we're saying at all.

But it's the very fact that sin is so serious that should make us run to God when we recognize that there is sin in our lives. Because by staying away from God, we will only make a sinful situation worse.

[12 : 43] You'll only make it worse. And of course, God knows that, which is why he says, come to me.

Come to me. So if you have kind of mucked up in your life, if you've mucked up in the past week, or if you've never really come to God, if you're not a Christian yet, or not sure if you're a Christian, how is God going to treat you if you come to him today?

Is he going to be disappointed? Is he going to be reluctant? Is he going to be critical? Is he going to be harsh?

In no way. He's going to be gentle. And so there is a gentle God calling you to him today.

And if you push him away, then I don't think it's God who's got the heart, heart.

[13 : 48] And the key point being emphasized here is that the answer to the traumas that we face in life is to go to God. So if you're frustrated with somebody at work, go to God and talk to him about it and ask him to give you patience and strength to deal with this.

If you're confronted by difficult circumstances, go to God and ask him to help you and to use these situations and experiences for your benefit and for your growth as a Christian.

If you are feeling stressed, feeling that kind of pressure, that kind of tense feeling that you get in the back of your neck when deadlines or emails or responsibilities are kind of hanging over you and pressurizing you and things are really weighing down heavy of you, which in all honesty, every single one of us faces at some point and we probably face it every Monday morning, go to God and talk to the gentle God of the Bible about it and ask for wisdom and strength and perseverance.

So all are reminded that God should be hearing a lot from us during the week. He should be hearing a lot from us. He should be hearing from you when you're at work or at school or at your lectures or whatever it is you're doing.

God should be hearing from you and do you know God will gently listen and he will always do what is best. The Bible teaches us that God is gentle, God the Father is patient and long suffering, God the Holy Spirit is the comforter, the one who is our helper, the one who will stand alongside us and

God the Son is the greatest model of gentleness that the world has ever seen.

[15 : 34] God is gentle. But the fact that God is gentle and thus our text here tells us in particular that Jesus is gentle is a reminder of the fact that as Christians that gentleness should be seen in us as well.

Christians should be gentle. But that raises the question, well how do we do that? Well in general terms, the New Testament makes it very clear that our walk, that's the phrase that the New Testament often uses to describe life as a Christian, our walk, our daily way of life must be characterised by gentleness.

A really important passage is in Ephesians 4, another of Paul's letters. He says, I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

You see the connection that's before you there, he's describing our walk, walk in a worthy manner and then in verse 2 he gives us the specific characteristics of what that walk looks like and one of them is gentleness.

We've been reminded here that gentleness is essential for walking through this week and through every week of your life in a worthy manner.

[17 : 01] That means bearing with one another, it means accommodating for one another's weaknesses because we all have weaknesses whether we are aware of them or not and seeking to maintain a unity as God's people and to build up the bonds of peace that we have.

And of course all of these things, sometimes it maybe hits home more clearly when we think of it in the opposite terms, we must never forget that an un-gentle walk is an unworthy walk.

And there's various ways that we could describe this but perhaps the simplest way to understand how we should be gentle is to say that Christians should be thoroughly nice people.

Now that may sound superficial and you might say, oh man Thomas you're from Lewis, you're supposed to be much tougher than that in terms of what you say. But no, I don't agree with that at all, I think we need to reclaim the value of the word nice because it's something that we should take immensely seriously.

Every single person who has contact with us as Christians should come away thinking they were nice. And every single person who comes into this congregation or into Carlyway or wherever should come away thinking those people were so nice.

[18 : 34] It should be a defining characteristic of us. And the reason that is so important is because a failure to be gentle and a failure to be nice is incredibly damaging.

How many times has work been a nightmare for you because people have not been nice?

How many times has school been hard because people have not been nice? Being un-gentle, being harsh is a horrible thing and if a Christian is not nice then I can do a huge amount of damage.

If I go back to Galatians 5, Paul talks about that sort of thing. He says, if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you're not consumed by one another.

It's like harshness is self-destructive. Same again, let's not become conceited, provoking one another, envy in one another. That kind of hostility and horribleness to one another is something that we must, must guard against.

[19 : 45] And at one level this is a really serious warning to us all because we must never forget that you are only one step away from not being nice.

So you could get up in the morning with the best of intentions and you could think, you know, I'm going to really make sure and then somebody gets you by saying or doing something that pushes your buttons and that frustrates you.

And before you even know it, you can react with harshness and coldness and cruelty. And that's why we need to pray that God would keep us.

It's a great prayer to pray, Lord, keep me. But at another level, this is not just a warning, it's a huge encouragement because how many of you, so how many of you here, you don't need to answer this, but just rhetorically, how many of you here can go and work all that cool AV stuff at the back? Maybe some of you can, maybe you can't. How many of you could stand up here and talk for too long like people like me can? You know, not necessarily all of you. How many of you could go and do the church accounts?

[20 : 56] Definitely not me, no chance. Some people love that kind of thing. How many of you could go and entertain a room full of five-year-olds for an hour? You know, not all of us can do all of

these things, all of these things.

Some of us can do, some of us can't. How many of you can be nice tomorrow? All of you. All of you. So it's a brilliant opportunity to be a witness by showing your gentleness towards every single person that you meet. Gentleness should be a characteristic of every part of our lives.

I'm sure this has been mentioned as part of this study. In the New Testament, you have gifts of the Spirit and fruit of the Spirit. Gifts of the Spirit are things that some people have, some of them. Everybody has all of them. Some have some, some have others. But fruit of the Spirit is different. Fruit of the Spirit is something that should be characterizing every single Christian.

[21 : 56] So God is gentle. We should be gentle. Two great principles, two really important things to remember. But if you look at the word gentleness in the New Testament, it's actually got more to teach us, I think, if you do what we call a word study.

So it's a really good thing to do when you're looking at the Bible. If you come across a word that's maybe unusual or a phrase, just search for it. So if you've got a Bible app on your phone, you'll be able to pick a search and just type it in.

So if you type in the word gentleness, the word gentle, it'll pick up for you where this is mentioned in other parts of the Bible. It's good to do with people's names. It's good to do with places. It's good to do with certain key words.

If you do that with the word gentleness and see where it comes up elsewhere in the New Testament, you discover something very interesting because the New Testament makes a very, very clear link between gentleness and something.

Okay? You don't have to answer it out loud, but in your heads answer that question. What do you think the New Testament links gentleness with?

[23 : 10] Marriage, parenting, church? What do you think? Well, the New Testament makes a very clear link between gentleness and controversy.

And I want us to just look at this together and look at three or four examples together. There's actually an example of this just a few verses later in Genesis 6, chapter 1.

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

Keep watching yourself lest you two be tempted. There a link is being made between gentleness and church discipline. Now when we talk about church discipline, we're talking about something really important.

It's actually what we would say an essential part of what defines a church. And it's basically conveying the fact that as a church, we have a responsibility to nurture, to encourage, to direct, and when necessary to correct those who are members of the church.

[24 : 30] As a reminder, the Christian church is not a do whatever you like society. There's certain things that we expect of people, certain responsibilities that need to be maintained, and there's certain things that are unacceptable.

And if they were to manifest themselves, we would want to address. And so part of being a member of the church is that you are under the discipline of the church, in particular under the discipline of your elders.

They're like shepherds looking after a flock. They are watching over you, looking over you to make sure that you are okay. Now sometimes we might associate the word discipline with the idea of something bad and something harsh, kind of have negative connotations in our minds.

But real proper discipline is not a harsh thing. It's a beautiful thing because at the heart of any family is discipline.

And it's a clear demonstration that you care. I often think about the fact that when my children were we, I've got three wonderful children, but when they were we, like starting to walk and running around, I remember thinking you're constantly having to tell them off.

[25 : 51] You're constantly having to say, keep away from the stove, watch the road, watch the stairs, and you have to give them rows when they don't listen to you, and you're doing it to protect them.

And I remember thinking, I'm constantly having to give them rows, and it's all to just protect them. It's not to hurt them.

And the same principle applies as a church. If somebody wanders off, if someone gets into trouble, we want to bring them back and we want to help them. But the point that Paul is making, when a

church has to engage in that kind of discipline, if somebody gets caught in a transgression, so if somebody makes a massive mistake, so if somebody develops an addiction that grips them and takes over their life, if somebody has a moral failure, a catastrophic moral failure in their life, we want to restore them.

But Paul is saying that has always got to be done gently. And I noticed that you had New Elders last week.

That's fantastic. Not that I'm an expert in giving people advice, but I would say one thing I would say to the New Elders to advise them is this, always, always be gentle.

[27 : 22] The great goal of church discipline is to gently restore people so that they're no longer under sin and they're once again able to serve God in his church.

Mental discipline is going against God's word. Going against God's word is another name for sin. It's a reminder of the fact that as a church, we should never, ever hurt people. Sometimes we need to challenge people, sometimes we need to correct people, sometimes we need to question people, sometimes we disagree with people, but we must never, ever hurt them.

The world is where we get hurt. The church is where we are gentle. So that's a link between gentleness and discipline.

Another example is in 2 Timothy 2, verse 24 to 26, the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone able to teach patiently and during evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

[28 : 33] Here a link has been made between another controversy between gentleness and correcting opponents. So if someone is in the wrong, if someone opposes us as a church, if someone opposes us as a faith, we are to correct them, but we are to do so with gentleness.

So apply that in practical terms. How should we act towards the people who want to remove all religious influence in schools? How should we deal with people who don't share our views, a biblical view on marriage or a biblical view on gender?

How should we deal with militant secularism? We are to be gentle.

Correct opponents with gentleness. Now that does not mean that we compromise because we have to always remain faithful to God's standards.

Being uncompromising and kind of flattery, that would be a counterfeit of gentleness. Biblical gentleness does not compromise, but being uncompromising does not mean being harsh.

[29 : 41] That's a really important thing to remember. And the truth is, if we are aggressive to our opponents, that's when we are compromising our standards because that is when we are being worldly.

Because aggression is a worldly thing, not a godly thing. Our gentleness is a witness, as Paul says in the very next verses, that our gentleness can help bring our opponents to their senses and put their trust in Jesus.

So New Testament makes a very deliberate link between gentleness and correcting opponents. Question number three is in Titus 3. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle. There's various things to highlight here, but I just want to pick the one that immediately precedes gentleness. That's the link between gentleness and quarreling. If we are confronted with quarreling as Christians, what should our attitude be?

It should be gentleness. Now that's very, very challenging. We've been reminded that when somebody provokes us, when someone provokes you, what should our response be?

[31 : 04] Gentleness. And that is not easy. It's not easy, but it's incredibly important because what is our goal when we are confronted with our quarrel?

Our goal is that the quarrel will come to an end. Christians should always be peacemakers. We should always be looking for reconciliation. As a good example of that in Philippians 4, when Paul entreats these two women, Yodia and Sinti, to agree in the Lord, Paul is trying to gently bring a resolution to this quarrel.

So quarreling, gentleness. Again the connection is made. This is the last example, just to go through quickly. It's found this time from Peter. But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed, have no fear of them nor be troubled, but in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason, for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect.

Here Peter makes a link between gentleness and apologetics. Apologetics is the defense of the faith whereby we are trying to present the proof of the truth of Christianity, where we are trying to defend it from opposition, where we are also trying to actually persuade others to turn from falsehood and to follow the truth.

As Christians it's really important that we are ready to give an answer for the reasons why we believe what we believe. So if somebody says to us, why do you believe that there is a God? We can say there is clear evidence of order and design in the world around us.

[32 : 43] And nothing, absolutely nothing in our experience has ever demonstrated that order and reality like this can come from nothing simply by chance. Even the most basic principles of rationality, morality, truth and love do not point, do not evidence a world of meaningless chance but to created order.

If someone says to us, why do you believe that the Bible is true? We can say it is the most historically attested document of the classical period. It has been repeatedly readified by archaeological evidence and the contents of the Bible itself are so perfectly coherent, so majestic in style and so relevant and powerful in its ability to speak to our situations that it abundantly evidences itself to be the Word of God.

If someone says to us, are not all religions the same and different ways to the same God? We can say no, we believe that the claims of Jesus Christ are unique. But although His message is inclusive and that it is offered to everyone, yet at the same time that message is exclusive because He alone is the Savior of sinners.

No one comes to the Father but by Him. There's many, many questions that we can face from people. That's just three examples we need to be ready to give answers.

The Paul is reminding us that when we speak to the questioner, to the skeptic, or even to the opponent of the Christian faith, we need to speak with gentleness.

[34 : 23] So is it ever right for a Christian to insult an atheist on Twitter or on Facebook or face to face?

Is it ever right? Well, the screen is telling you it's not.

We should always be gentle, always. And these four examples show us that the New Testament makes a very, very clear link between gentleness and controversy.

Quarrels, opposition, questions, discipline, all of these should be dealt with gently. And that raises the question, why is that?

Why does the New Testament make the connection between gentleness and controversy? Well, I think the reason it makes the connection is because gentleness is incredibly powerful.

[35 : 22] And that might sound strange because gentleness is often seen as a weakness, but the reality is that gentleness is incredibly powerful. Because if you have a quarrel between two people, or if you have a sin in the life of a believer, or if you have opposition from somebody, if you are faced with a situation like that, if you are faced with some kind of controversy as a Christian, if you go into that situation and you are harsh, then you are only going to make the situation worse.

But if you are gentle, you can turn a quarrel into reconciliation. You can turn a fall into sin, into a sanctifying experience, and you can turn an opponent into a brother.

And you are not going to do any of those things if you are cold, or harsh, or arrogant, but you can if you are gentle.

And that's highlighted very clearly in Romans 12, repay no one evil for evil. But give thought to what is honourable in the sight of all, if possible, so far as it is dependent on you, live peaceably with all, beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God for its written vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord, to the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him something to drink, for by doing so you will heap burning coals in his head. Do not overcome, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[36 : 51] And as always, the Bible makes perfect sense when it's compared with reality, because ask yourself the question, who are the people you respect most in your life?

Think of them, and then ask the question, are they harsh people, or are they gentle people? And the key point in it all is that God knows that gentleness is powerful.

That's why when it comes to the most difficult and controversial situations that we will face as a church, God says, be gentle. Now, a couple of important things to remember, I want to just mention them very briefly before I close, and really I'm going to close in a second.

One is doctrinal accuracy is not an excuse for a lack of gentleness. We can be orthodox in what we say, but we can be sinful in how we say it.

We must never think that orthodoxy is an excuse for a lack of gentleness. But on the other side, we must never think that gentleness is an excuse for poor theology, because being gentle does not mean being spineless.

[37 : 57] It does not mean compromising on our theology. In fact, it means the very opposite, because the gentle Christian is the one who really knows their theology, because it is theology that teaches us that we ourselves are recipients of grace from our gentle God.

And it teaches us that vengeance and judgment is ultimately God's prerogative and not ours.

Theology teaches us that the Christian church is a family where we nurture and guide and discipline and help each other because we love each other and because we want to help one another.

Theology teaches us that hostility, aggression, and conflict is worldly, and therefore it's damaging to the distinctive witness of the Church of Christ. And theology teaches us that Jesus is gentle, and we never have an excuse to be anything other than Christlike.

So the truth is, gentleness is a quality that is found in the strongest. Jesus is the strongest, most powerful, most influential person who's ever walked on this earth.

He was also the most gentle. Gentleness is an amazing thing. That's why it's part of the fruit of the Spirit. Gentleness is incredibly powerful, and that's why our prayer must be, oh God, make me more gentle.

[39 : 28] Amen. Let's pray. God our Father, we thank you for your gentleness.

A gentleness that goes beyond what we can really grasp. Your gentleness is just amazing.

We thank you for that so, so much. We thank you that we can come to the God who reigns over all and know that you will be gentle.

And we pray, oh God, that we will be gentle as well. That in the week ahead, we would be gentle with the people around us, the people who are battered by the effects of a broken world.

We pray that we would be a source of gentle love and care and hope to these people. Please forgive us for all the times that we've been un-gentle, all the times we've judged, all the times we've been harsh, all the times we've been aggressive, all the times we've lacked self-control.

[40 : 47] And oh God, please make us more gentle. Make us more like Jesus. Amen. Amen.