

**I**t's not easy being gentle in a brutal world. In fact, choosing gentleness sometimes requires boldness. It's a lot easier to remain silent, walk away or even react with anger or violence; it's much more difficult to respond with gentleness. Gentleness makes many think of weakness, but in reality gentleness requires incredible inner strength, self-control and boldness.

The gentleness with which we treat a newborn baby is the same gentleness that Paul commands us to have toward others. He says that as apostles, "we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

To consider gentleness, we must first consider Jesus. When Jesus gives us a self-description in Matthew 11:29 (NRSV), gentleness tops the list: "I am gentle and humble in heart." The gentleness of Jesus was actually prophesied hundreds of years before. "See, your king comes to you...gentle and riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). Isaiah 42:3 foretold that Christ would not break a "bruised reed" or snuff out a "smoldering wick."

Jesus was clothed in gentleness, allowing him to enter into the lives of broken, hurting people. When we're clothed in gentleness, we'll be able to do likewise.

The Bible is clear that if we call Christ our master, we will display gentleness. "Let your gentleness be known to everyone" (Philippians 4:5, NRSV). "Clothe yourselves

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with...gentleness" (Colossians 3:12). "But as for you, man of God...pursue...gentleness" (I Timothy 6:11, NRSV).

Sometimes it's a faulty view of God that can lead us to be harsh with ourselves and with others. If we view God as a legalistic

taskmaster, it is pretty hard to live with a gentle spirit. The two just don't mix.

If we believe God demands perfection, we will demand the same of ourselves and of others. Whenever others, or we, fall short, watch

out! Gentleness doesn't mean that we ignore people's failings (God doesn't ignore ours). But it does call us to respond to them in a godly manner.

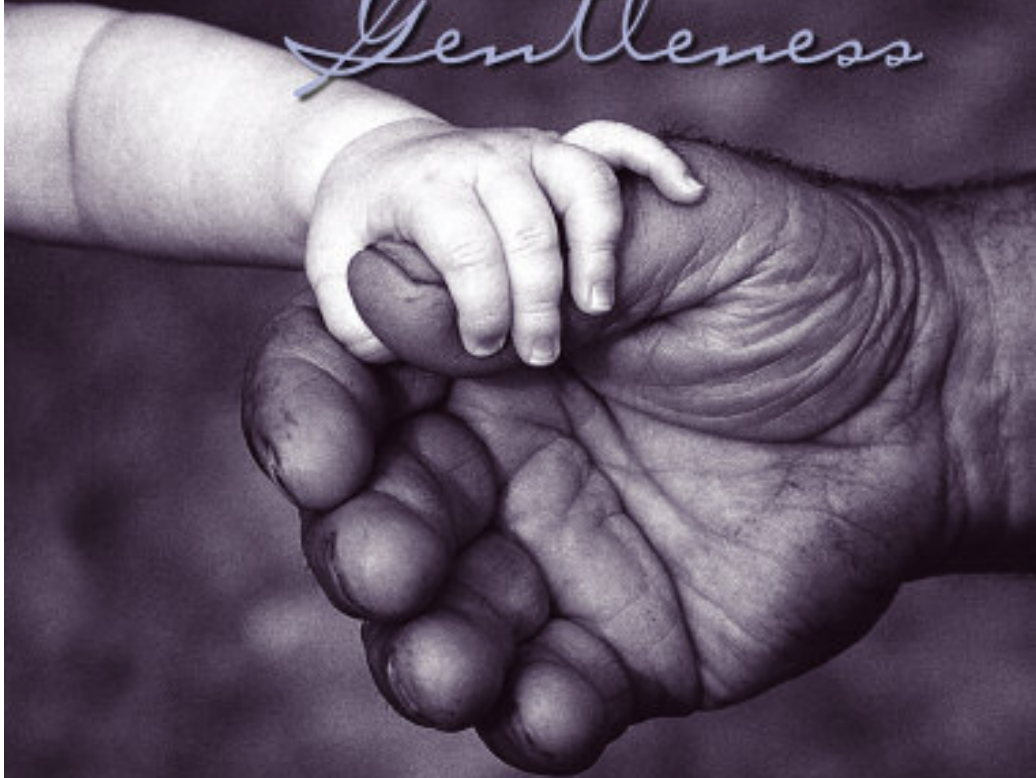
Gentleness applies grace, which means no one has to earn it. Gentleness is not reserved for the

deserving; it is a gift we bestow to all. People are easily wounded, and the souls we encounter every day are delicate. On the exterior they may look fine, but inside many are "bruised reeds" just waiting to tumble. But we can be a channel of gentleness to those around us that need a touch of Jesus.

The depths of God's gentleness cannot be fathomed, but when we allow ourselves to be immersed in the gentleness with which Christ treats us, it will calm us and calm others. A gentle spirit gives the world a taste of the presence of Jesus—gentleness is a fruit that a hungry world needs to survive. □

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# Choosing *Gentleness*



BY TAMMY DARLING