



## GATHERING AT THE TABLE OF GENTLENESS

### *In Advance*

Prepare the welcome table by arranging the bowl(s) or tray(s) of fruit brought in to share. Open the Bible to Galatians 5 and place the white pillar candle or taper nearby. Be sure to have matches or a lighter handy for the person designated to light the candle. *If following the opening suggestion (see below), you'll need to communicate in advance with teachers or parents to have one of the children's classes or a few of the children ready to participate.*

### *As People Arrive*

Greet everyone. Introduce newcomers and visitors to other class members. Keep in mind that bearing the fruit of the Spirit begins the moment the first person walks in the door.

### *To Open*

Just prior to getting started, pass around the fruit so those who've arrived can enjoy it. Reserve a portion of the fruit as a display on the worship table and, **this week, to share with the children who join the class at the beginning.** Once it's time to start, call attention to the worship table. Invite everyone to focus on the fruit on the table as you read aloud Galatians 5:22-23. Light (or have someone else light) the Christ candle on the worship table.

Conclude the gathering time with prayer. Consider using Psalm 146:1-2 as the starting point.

## EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF GENTLENESS

According to Kenneson, this eighth fruit of the Spirit can be translated as *gentleness*, meekness, or humility. In the Old Testament, the word is associated with the lowly and poor who nonetheless humbly trust in God alone. In the New Testament, the word finds expression in Jesus' charge that "whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

**An Action Parable.** Arrange in advance for several young children (4-6 years old) to visit the class. Invite children from a children's Sunday School class or some children whose parents are part of your group. Have ready some puzzles, coloring books and crayons, play dough, or a pile of building blocks on the floor in the middle of the room. When the children arrive, encourage class members to interact

with them—talk to them, listen to them, play with them—for seven or eight minutes. Bring this “play time” to a close by inviting the children to share some of the group’s fruit (along with some animal crackers and juice). Be sure a parent or another adult is available to escort the children back to their own class. Plan this activity to take 10–12 minutes; but be flexible. The whole point is to simulate something of what the disciples may have experienced when Jesus put children in their midst.

**Discussion Option.** In lieu of inviting children into the class as described above, talk about persons’ experiences with small children—in their own homes, in a nursery setting, as grandparents or baby-sitters. Summarize the attributes that characterize young children.

Then hear Matthew 18:1-5 read aloud and discuss these questions:

- ◆ What does Jesus see in children that his disciples—and many in his day—did not see?
- ◆ In proclaiming children as an example to emulate, what did Jesus mean for his disciples to change about themselves?
- ◆ What do children have to teach us about gentleness, meekness, and humility?

## EXAMINING THE FRUIT OF GENTLENESS

### *Character of the Fruit*

Thus far the starting point for studying the character of the fruits of the Spirit has been the character of God. With the fruit of gentleness we start with the character of Jesus to get to the character of God.

Hear read Matthew 11:28-29. Then read aloud the following excerpt from Kenneson’s book:

*“When we look for a king born of royalty, we find instead a baby wrapped in strips of cloth lying in a manger, born to a peasant girl of no account. When Jesus’ time has come to begin his ministry and we look for him to put John the Baptizer in his place, we find instead a Jesus who humbly approaches John in order to be baptized by him. When we look for Jesus to take the world by storm, to win over those who have power, influence and prestige in order to advance his kingdom more efficiently, we find instead an itinerant preacher and healer who spends much of his time with the weak and outcast of society: children, lepers, prostitutes and tax-collectors. When we see Jesus rejected by the Samaritans, we look for him to do what his disciples wanted done—to rain down fire upon them—but instead he rebukes us. When we look for the conquering hero to make his move, to enter into the royal city on his white charger to signal to the*

*people that the time has come to establish his kingdom, we find instead a Jesus who enters into Jerusalem astride a humble donkey. When we gather with him for the last time in that upper room, expecting to get our marching orders and to honor him by pledging our allegiance to him, we find instead that he honors us by washing our feet and by calling us his friends. When Jesus is arrested and taken before the authorities, we look for him to set those authorities straight, to proclaim proudly and defiantly that he is God's anointed one; instead we find him strangely silent, showing no need to justify himself. When we look for a deliverer who will crush the opposition by superior force, we find instead a servant-messiah who allows himself to be crushed and bruised for us. What kind of God is this?"*

- ◆ How does Kenneson's description of the gospel of Jesus' life reveal Jesus as "gentle and humble in heart"?
- ◆ Thinking about Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-29, how would you summarize what Jesus wants his disciples to learn from him?

Now have the group focus on the footwashing photograph on page 2 of the participant guide while someone reads John 13:1-15. Allow time after the Scripture passage is read for the group to reflect silently on the photograph. Invite persons to imagine Jesus holding their feet in his hands . . . Then discuss:

- ◆ What message does Jesus' act of humility in washing feet send to our culture today?
- ◆ What could (or should) the humility and gentleness expressed in Jesus' washing his disciples' feet look like among Jesus' disciples today?

### ***Obstacles***

Have the group scan the headlines and statistics at the top of page 2 in the participant guide. Call attention to Kenneson's statement in the excerpt on the other side of the Learner Guide sheet: "*We are both the most violent society in the world and the one that immerses itself most deeply in portrayals of violence.*"

As a total group discuss your responses to that statement and identify the real challenges violence in society poses for the cultivation of gentleness, humility, and meekness in daily life. Then discuss this question:

- ◆ Where in your own life are you most aware of the drive to get ahead, to be assertive, to strive for power and control, clashing with the biblical concept of gentleness?

# BEARING THE FRUIT OF GENTLENESS IN THE WORLD

Kenneson highlights three ways to help the church—us—cultivate the fruit of gentleness and humility.

- (1) a posture of prayer
- (2) a pattern of yielding in speech and act
- (3) a practice of hospitality

Use as many of the following questions as time allows to discuss the three ways of cultivating gentleness.

## PRAYER

- ◆ When was the last time you prayed for someone you would consider an adversary, someone who has hurt you in some way?

**Consider making an effort this next week to pray for enemies as well as friends—on your knees.**

## SPEECH AND ACT

- ◆ How does this congregation deal with conflicts and controversy? To what extent is “willingness to yield and to leave the results up to God” part of your congregational character?

**Consider in a future conflict or argument, resisting the temptation to attack; instead try to yield. Gently. Humbly. See what happens.**

## HOSPITALITY

- ◆ Kenneson observes that the gentleness and humility modeled by Christ is displayed in acts of hospitality. When was the last time you welcomed one of “the least of these,” a child, the lowly, the stranger?

**Consider spending time in the next few weeks with someone you tend to ignore or exclude. Pray for the power and perspective to reach out to them in humility.**

Close your group time by inviting persons to take some item used or created by the children at the beginning of the hour—a coloring sheet, a block, a piece of play dough. Let it serve as a reminder of the gentleness and humility modeled by Jesus. Then pray these words from Ephesians 4:1-3:

*“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love . . .”*