

Icebreaker: Do you remember your parents being more gentle or more strong? What was healthy about your mom or dad being gentle or strong in their parenting?

Lectio divina:

As we have done previously, we would like your group to participate in lectio divina, which is a slow, contemplative praying of scripture. Pick three readers from your group (a mix of male and female if your group is a mixed group).

Ask the first reader to read Matthew 11:28-30. During the reading ask group members to listen for a word or phrase that touches their heart or stands out to them. Allow for a period of silence after the scripture is read. Ask group members to reflect on the word or phrase that stood out to them. After the silence, each person shares the word or phrase they reflected on.

As the second person reads, ask group members to ponder their word or phrase and ask where it touches their life that day. After the silence, each person shares where he or she feels the word or phrase it touching or impacting his or her life.

During the third reading, ask group members to think about what Jesus in the text is calling them to do or to become today or this week. After the silence, each person shares what he or she thinks Jesus is calling them to today or in the next week.

Read Philippians 4:2-9 and discuss:

1. As followers of Jesus, we desire to be like Jesus. In what ways was Jesus' life an example of gentleness for us?
2. Are there circumstances in your life that make gentleness impossible or difficult? How could your relationship with God empower you to alter your reaction to these circumstances?
3. When we think of gentleness, sometimes we think of weakness or meekness. Our culture values strength. Is it possible to be both gentle and strong? If yes, how?

Prayer

As you close in prayer, stand in a circle. Keeping in mind the responses from group members during lectio divina, go around the circle and pray for the person on your right. Also remember requests from our church family:

> We celebrate with Rachael, Griffin, and Hadrian Foster in the birth of Silas Henry!

Reminders for your group:

- > Get your group together and join us for the Messy Mission Run on May 13 at 9 am. Proceeds benefit ZPC's high school trip to Mexico.
- > If gardening is your thing, adopt a garden plot behind the Jeremiah House and grow fresh veggies for the Zionsville Food Pantry. Contact Greg Lanham [mrgham335@yahoo.com]

Leader's Notes:

Gentleness is in a category of godly characteristics similar to others we have discussed, such as humility, faithfulness, and self-control. Why do these matter? God calls us to be like him in our character. If we are out of control, arrogant, selfish, or agitated we are not living like God at all. But in our self-control, depending on God, we can live with humility and faithfulness, and be gentle in our dealings with others. By practicing these qualities we can be a good example for God and by doing so bring about God's kingdom on earth and bring others to God. This week, discuss how being gentle, yet strong in your character, helps you to live more like Jesus.

Lectio Divina: As you may remember, we have suggested a version of lectio divina on previous study guides. This is a more in-depth version that will allow individuals space to relax, breath, and think about God's word. Those who regularly practice this method of praying and sharing scripture find it to be a good way of developing trust within a group.

[Question 1] Some examples of Jesus' gentleness might be the way Jesus treated the woman caught in adultery (John 8), the way Jesus treated Zaccheus (Luke 19), or the way Jesus often heals those who are sick, hurting, or blind. He is gentle with those in need. We can all care for, and be inspired to care for, those in need.

Question 2] Under stress it can be difficult to be gentle. If we are weary, sick, dealing with financial concerns or depressed, it can be difficult to be gentle. These are the times we need to come to Jesus – who can handle our issues, carry our burdens and who is gentle and humble in heart.

Question 3] Jesus is both gentle and strong many times. He stands up to Pharisees who often test him, the way Jesus prays to God and then meets the Roman soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane show both gentleness and strength, and the way he handles angry crowds at Nazareth shows his character. We can be firm in our convictions – yet gentle as we speak the truth in love in ways we are called to do so.

Prayer: Make sure you pray for the person on your right in your group. Pray personally for their needs – allowing your knowledge of their needs to soften your heart towards them – and then pray with compassion for them.