

Icebreaker:

Before he talks about gentleness, Paul says to rejoice. Share one thing to your group that you are currently rejoicing about.

Please read this week's scripture and discuss:

1. A yoke is a type of harness that rests on the neck of oxen allowing them to pull a plow or cart. In Matthew 11, Jesus says his yoke should be easy. Is Jesus' yoke resting lightly on you or do you find it heavy? How can taking his yoke lead to rest for your soul?
2. Some people might equate gentleness with weakness. Yet both Jesus and Paul often seem bold and strong. How can gentleness be strong?
3. Craig Barnes remarks that gentleness "arises from strength, from strong people who choose to honor the sacredness of their relationships." Have you been in a situation or in a relationship where you have experienced this kind of gentleness that allowed you to be in relationship despite strong differences/opinions that you had?
4. Do you find it easy or difficult to believe that, as Philippians says, "Jesus is near"? How might you live differently if you believed that more deeply?
5. In our culture, there is much worry, anxiety and stress. In Philippians 4, Paul says not to worry. How can gentleness be a response to the worries and stress of the world?
6. Jean Vanier says that until we understand that our enemies are wounded people who are loved by God we will not be able to be gentle with them. Do you struggle with believing that? If you were able to see others like that, would it be helpful for you to be more gentle?
7. Along with gentleness, Paul says the peace of God will guard your hearts and be with you. What does the peace of God feel like, look like?

Some in our American culture might equate gentleness with weakness. However, the Bible does not. Jesus does not. Gentleness is discussed often in the New Testament. It is a fruit of the Spirit and taught by Jesus. This is the same Jesus who overturned the tables in the Temple, verbally sparred with the Pharisees and went to the cross. Gentleness is great quality to have and to practice if we want to be more like Jesus.

1. A yoke would be a wooden apparatus, like a collar, used on oxen in Jesus' day. It seems to be a heavy thing, but actually it would make the pulling of the cart more manageable. Jesus wants us to join him in his work. Still, for some, working with Jesus can feel heavy. But trusting Jesus can be calming for our souls.
2. Gentleness can mean treating others with kindness and expressing things in a gentle tone. But Christians can still stand for strength, say things that are truthful and sometimes hard, or even correct our children and be gentle. To respond to someone who is angry with a gentle tone takes great strength.
3. If you can, have people in your group share where they have used gentleness or seen gentleness even in difficult relationships or conversations. These good examples can help encourage us to remember how gentleness looks in relationship.
4. Some scholars debate what "Jesus is near / The Lord is near" means. Some think it means literally near to us, sitting right next to us. Others think it means that Jesus' return is soon. If Jesus is right beside us, we might treat others differently or even act differently even in our private lives. If Jesus is returning soon, we might live with more urgency and less apathy.
5. With American culture comes constant bombardment of messages from our smartphones and media. With the expectations of success and feeling like we fail at times, comes stress and worry. Being gentle and calm can help others to be calm and gentle. If we live differently, even in our demeanor and how we treat others, others might be impacted to be more gentle themselves (like Christ).
6. How do we see someone who opposes us? People often act out of their own sense of being "less than." If we understand they are often wounded or hurting people, we may respond with gentleness and compassion to them.
7. The peace of God surpasses all understanding and can be like a soothing balm to our souls. It can help us to react almost unnaturally (peacefully) to very difficult circumstances. God's peace within us can help us to be gentle and not frantic or defensive.