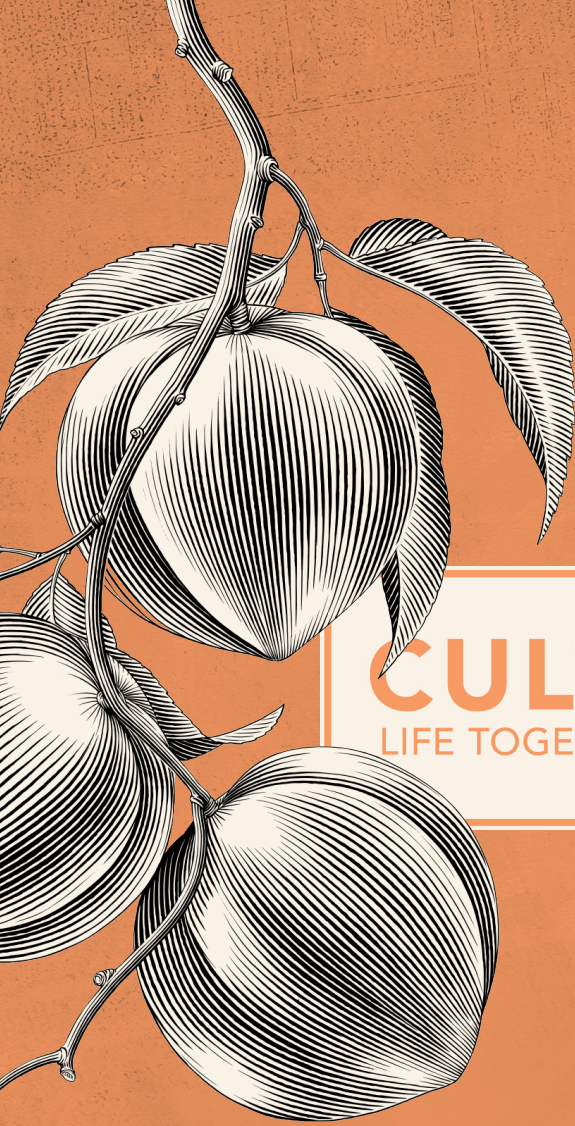




CULTIVATE

LIFE TOGETHER IN THE SPIRIT

SEPTEMBER
GROUP GUIDE

Welcome to Cultivate.

We're so glad you're here.

This month, we turn our attention to the fruit of the Spirit called gentleness.

Gentleness can sometimes be mistaken for weakness, passivity, or simply being nice. But Scripture gives us a much fuller picture. Biblical gentleness is strength shaped by love. It is the ability to remain tender, steady, and attentive even when circumstances are difficult or emotions are high.

In his book *Cultivate: How God Grows the Fruit of the Spirit Within Us*, Pastor Rich offers a simple picture that helps us understand gentleness alongside two other qualities of the fruit of the Spirit: kindness and goodness.

In “The Broken Bike” (pages 129–132), Pastor Rich asks us to imagine a child sitting beside a broken bike. The chain has slipped, the wheel is bent, and the child is frustrated and embarrassed.

Kindness sees the need, kneels down, and helps fix the bike.

Then you notice that a group of older kids caused the damage. Goodness stands up, walks over, and calmly confronts what is wrong.

But even after the bike is fixed and the conflict has passed, the child is still sitting quietly on the curb. Gentleness sits down beside him. It does not rush him or try to make everything better. It listens. It stays. It gives him room to breathe.

Pastor Rich summarizes the distinction as:

“Kindness helps. Goodness intervenes. Gentleness listens.”

He then expands the idea further. Kindness shows up with help. Goodness shows up with courage. Gentleness shows up with presence. These are not simply different versions of being nice. They are distinct ways the Spirit teaches us to love people well.

That distinction matters because gentleness does not mean being passive. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is resist the urge to fix, correct, hurry, or control another person. Instead, we stay near enough to listen and strong enough to make room for what they are carrying.

Jesus describes himself this way:

**“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart...”**

Matthew 11:29

Jesus does not approach weary people with pressure or shame. He draws near. He carries burdens and speaks truth without crushing people beneath it. His gentleness is not the absence of strength, but rather strength offered for the good of another.

As the Spirit forms gentleness within us, the way we respond to others begins to change. Gentleness shapes our words when conflict rises and it changes the way we approach someone who is struggling. It helps us speak truth with humility and seek restoration rather than self-righteousness.

This month, we will explore a gentleness that carries, defuses, witnesses, and restores.

Before You Begin

As you move through this month's passages, keep the image of the broken bike in mind:

- Where might you be tempted to fix when God is inviting you to listen?
- Where might you hurry someone when God is inviting you to remain present?
- Where might the Spirit be teaching you to carry strength more gently?

Personal Reflection and Practice



Look up the passages below on your own and read them slowly. As you read, notice what each passage reveals about gentleness. What does it teach you about the character of God? What kind of posture does it invite you to practice?

Gentleness That Carries

Matthew 11:28–30

Ephesians 4:2

Isaiah 40:11

Gentleness makes room for the weary. It does not add weight to what someone is already carrying.

Reflection:

Where in your life do you need to receive the gentle care of Christ?

Who around you may need someone to help carry what feels heavy?

Gentleness That Defuses

Proverbs 15:1

2 Kings 5:1-14

James 1:19-20

Gentleness can interrupt escalation. A soft response can create space for humility, understanding, and change.

Reflection:

What usually happens inside of you when tension rises?
How might gentleness change the way you respond in moments of frustration or conflict?



Gentleness That Witnesses

Philippians 4:4-7

1 Peter 3:15-16

Titus 3:1-2

Gentleness makes our faith visible. The way we carry ourselves can reveal something about the God we trust.

Reflection:

What does your response to pressure communicate to the people around you?

Where might gentleness become part of your witness?



Gentleness That Restores

Galatians 6:1-5

Colossians 3:12-13

2 Timothy 2:24-25

Gentleness does not ignore what is broken. It moves toward restoration without shame or condemnation. Gentleness is not weakness. It is strength that has learned how to love.

Reflection:

Why do you think restoration requires gentleness?
What is the difference between correcting someone and restoring someone?



GROUP TIME

This outline is simply a suggested flow for your time together, not a prescription. Every group has its own rhythm and needs. Use what serves your group, release what doesn't, and trust the Spirit to guide your conversation.

SEPTEMBER

Cultivating Gentleness

Goal and Purpose: Reflect on gentleness as a fruit of the Spirit, explore how the gentleness of Jesus reshapes the way we respond to others, and notice where the Spirit may be inviting us to carry, defuse, witness, or restore with greater grace.

Themes for the Month:

Week 1: Gentleness That Carries

Week 2: Gentleness That Defuses

Week 3: Gentleness That Witnesses

Week 4: Gentleness That Restores

1. Welcome + Opening

Leader Says:

“Today, we continue our Cultivate journey by turning our attention to gentleness. Gentleness is sometimes confused with weakness, but Scripture presents it as something much stronger. Gentleness is strength shaped by love. It is the way Jesus approaches people with truth, compassion, and care.”

Invite participants to reflect:

- When you hear the word gentleness, what comes to mind?
- Who is someone you would describe as gentle? What is it about them that makes you say that?
- Do you tend to associate gentleness more with strength or weakness? Timidness? Quietness? Why?

Allow a few moments for reflection before sharing.

Leader Note: Creating a Safe Start

Gentleness is often easier to recognize in others than in ourselves. Encourage participants to approach the conversation with curiosity rather than self-criticism.

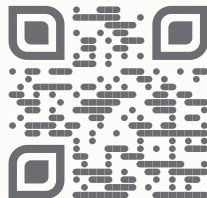
The goal is not to determine whether someone is “gentle enough,” but to notice how the Spirit may be shaping a gentler posture within each of us.



2. Watch the Teaching Video

Leader Prompt

“As you watch, listen for how Pastor Rich describes gentleness and what it reveals about the character of Jesus. Pay attention to where gentleness requires strength rather than weakness.”



Video Summary

- We speak thousands of words each day, and our words have the power to bless or curse, to bring life or harm.
- Jesus describes himself as “gentle and lowly of heart,” connecting gentleness with humility.
- Gentleness changes how we use our words. Instead of asserting our own importance, we use our words to serve others.
- After Peter denied Jesus, Jesus responded with gentleness rather than shame, inviting Peter back into relationship and purpose.
- Eugene Peterson’s story about speaking harshly to a young girl reminds us that even when correction is needed, the way we speak matters.
- Paul calls us to let our gentleness “be evident to all.” Our ability to live gently grows from knowing that the Lord is near.
- Because God is gentle with us, we can extend that same gentleness to others.

After the Video:

- What stood out to you most in the video?
 - Did anything challenge the way you normally think about gentleness?
 - Where did you hear a connection between gentleness and strength?
 - What might gentleness look like in one of your relationships right now?
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3. Hear the Word: Sitting with Gentleness

Leader Directions:

Invite one person to read the passage slowly.

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

After a brief pause, invite a second person to read the passage again, perhaps in a different translation.

If time allows, consider also reading this additional passage.

Proverbs 15:1

**A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.**

Leader Says:

“As you listen, simply notice the word, phrase, or image that draws your attention. Try not to analyze it yet. Just listen.”

4. Personal Reflection

Invite participants to sit quietly with the passage and reflect:

- Which word or phrase stood out to you?

- What does this passage reveal about the way Jesus approaches people?

- Where in your life do you need to experience this kind of gentleness?

- Where might Jesus be inviting you to offer this posture to someone else?

Encourage journaling or quiet reflection if helpful.

Leader reminder:

Insight is not required. Attention is enough.

5. Shared Reflection

Invite group conversation where participants feel comfortable.

Suggested prompts:

- What stayed with you from the passage?

- What surprises you about Jesus describing himself as gentle?

- How is gentleness different from avoiding conflict?

- What might change in our relationships if gentleness shaped the way we spoke and responded?

- Where do you think gentleness is especially needed in our culture right now?

Leader Note: Holding the Space

Gentleness is not the same as pretending that everything is fine. Scripture often connects gentleness with truth, correction, and restoration.

Help the group resist the idea that gentleness means avoiding difficult conversations. Instead, invite them to consider how truth can be spoken in a way that protects the dignity of another person.

Optional Group Practice: The Gentle Response

Invite participants to think quietly about a relationship or situation where tension has been present.

Ask them to consider:

- What usually happens in me when this situation comes up?

- What response am I tempted to give?

- What might a gentle response sound like?

- What would it look like to remain truthful without becoming harsh?

Allow a few moments for participants to write privately.

Remind the group that they do not need to share the specific situation.

Leader Says:

“Gentleness often begins in the small space between what happens to us and how we choose to respond. The Spirit can meet us in that space.”



6. Closing + Prayer

Leader Encouragement

Gentleness does not ask us to become less courageous or less truthful. It teaches us how to carry strength differently. As we stay close to Jesus, the Spirit can shape the tone of our words, the posture of our hearts, and the way we respond when relationships become difficult.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

Thank you for meeting us with compassion, patience, and gentleness.

When we are weary, help us receive your care.

When conflict rises, slow our words and soften our responses.

When we speak about our faith, help our lives reflect your gentleness.

When someone is struggling, give us wisdom to restore rather than condemn.

Form in us a strength that does not need to overpower others.

Teach us to speak truth with love, carry one another with compassion, and reflect your gentleness in every relationship.

We place ourselves in your care and trust the Spirit to continue forming us.

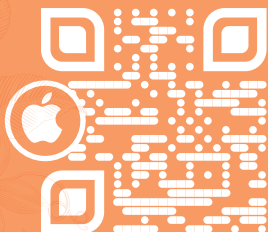
Amen.

Notes

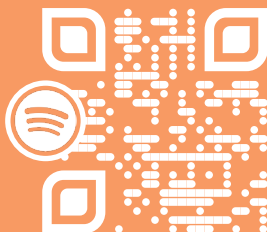
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Learning and growth don't stop when the guide closes! We invite you to listen to our podcasts and watch our videos, where you'll find teaching, conversations, and encouragement to continue your cultivation journey.

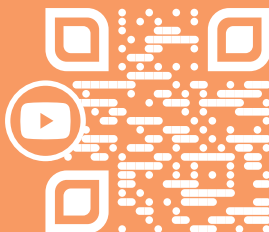
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Throughout 2026, we invite
you to journey with us
through Cultivate.

Each month, a guide is
offered to support reflection,
conversation and growth
as we walk together.



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