



Are We There Yet: Gentleness

OPENING PRAYER

Invite a member of the group to lead prayer.

Read John 8:2-11.

“Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’”

WEEK ONE: GENTLENESS

Over the past few weeks, many have experienced devastation from the violent winds and torrential rains produced from tornadoes and severe thunderstorms. Some experienced flooding in their homes, patches of their roofs blown off, fences destroyed, and trees snapped in half. These destructive winds and rains have caused conflict in our lives; causing us loss of electricity, time, money, and other resources. As a result, plans were delayed or cancelled. While we loathe the violent winds and rains, most of us welcome a gentle breeze on a hot, summer day and a gentle refreshing rain that provides living water for our vegetation and our lakes and animals. Gentleness makes the difference.

In our Scripture, often referred by scholars as the conflict narrative, the scribes and Pharisees hatched a plan to entrap Jesus. Jesus was teaching early in the morning at the temple to a large crowd. So, imagine a large crowd being assembled, like one of Pastor John's Tuesday morning Bible studies. The scribes and the Pharisees interrupt Jesus teaching, like a tornado on a pleasant day, to ask him a legal question. The scribes and a Pharisees bring a woman whom they state has been caught in the act of adultery and ask if the woman should be stoned according to the law. There are two major problems with their legal question: First, they provide no witnesses to support their charge against the woman. Second, where is the man? Jewish law is clear that both the man and woman should stand under the penalty of death. Clearly, the woman is being used as an object and the law is being used as a weapon to carry out their agenda to discredit and destroy Jesus.

Jesus does not answer their question, instead he bends down and writes on the ground. In Jesus' day, this nonverbal action was understood as a refusal to answer a question. Jesus refuses to fall for their trap. One of the lessons for us is that sometimes it is better to remain silent so that our words cannot be twisted or used to cause further harm; instead, we should let our actions speak. The scribes and Pharisees continue to press Jesus with questions. Jesus only answers when he is ready. Secondly, there are times when we need to pause, rather than rush into a response. During that pause, it gives us the opportunity to hear from God.

Jesus says, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." He starts writing on the ground again, a signal to everyone that he is done with the matter. No one cast a stone. Jesus chose to be a gentle breeze and refreshing rain. Jesus reminded the scribes, Pharisees, and everyone gathered: their past actions should inform their present actions. Instead of death for their past sins, they received grace and mercy.

Jesus addresses the woman directly, elevating her to the same status as the scribes and Pharisees, informing her that she has a fresh start and she should sin no more. The woman's future actions should reflect the grace and mercy God has shown her.

Who are we in the text? Are we the scribes and Pharisees who use Scripture to advance our own agendas or to affirm our implicit bias towards others? Do we treat others as objects if it works to our advantage? Are we the person who is accused of wrongdoing while others are not held accountable? Are we the person who demonstrates gentleness? As followers of Jesus Christ, we should show gentleness. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit; which God has made available to all believers (Galatians 5:23).

GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Share where you've seen God at work in your life this week.

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Define gentleness in your own words. How do we show gentleness without becoming a pushover?

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How do you deal with conflict? Avoid it? Or do you go on attack mode? Or try to resolve/ manage the conflict?

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Share a time when you chose to demonstrate gentleness while others were calling for punishment.

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How does Jesus' response to the scribes and Pharisees inform how we apply this Scripture? How can we be sure our motives are pure when applying Scripture to others?

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PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Please go around the group and have each person share a praise for this week and a prayer request/concern.

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CLOSING PRAYER

Have a volunteer lead closing prayer: asking for prayer concerns and lifting up the needs of the group.

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WC ENCOUNTER GROUPS CURRICULUM

WEEK ONE: GENTLENESS

FAMILY ENCOUNTER

BEING GENTLE LIKE JESUS: AS A FAMILY

Supplies:

- Bible
- Sacred Candle & Matches/Lighter
- Writing utensil for each person
- Blank sheet of paper for each person
- Optional: Kinetic Sand and paper plate for each person

WELCOMING GOD:

Gather together, and welcome God into this time and space through the lighting of a candle. Take this moment to pause briefly and sit quietly in this light for a few moments allowing time for everyone to relax their body, mind, and spirit for this time. In these moments, the invitation is to become aware of God's presence with and amongst you as a family.

SHARING WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER:

Say: "If anything is on our minds that makes it difficult for us to focus, let's share it now and then let it go."

- Whoever leads this portion might share what is on his or her mind to model this. Give time for each person to respond. When everyone has responded that would like to, invite everyone to place their hands out and lift them up as we give these distractions to God.

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

Say: "In our Scripture this week, Jesus showed gentleness when everyone else experienced different emotions. The woman was surely scared. Her accusers were angry. But Jesus isn't expressing either of these emotions. Listen for the way Jesus responds..."

Read aloud John 8:2-11.

- Take turns reading the Scripture or have a different family member read the Scripture each week.

ENCOUNTERING EACH OTHER:

Say: "One of the funny things about this story is that while everyone else is caught up in their emotions, Jesus just writes in the sand. Lots of people wonder what it is he wrote. Sometimes, we can get lost in wondering so much about what Jesus wrote that we forget how Jesus behaved in this moment. Everyone gathered seems to be wrapped up in their desire for an answer. They were angry. Or they wanted to trap Jesus. Jesus hears what upsets others without getting upset himself. Then, when the Pharisees leave, he simply asks her if anyone has punished her - already knowing they haven't because they walked away, and she's not hurt.

Even better, Jesus says he doesn't want to do that either and sends her on her way with the command to not sin again. He believes she can do better. Jesus shows her gentleness and kindness!"

Activity: Take a moment to think about your life. What is the gentle or kind word you might need from Jesus today? Write or illustrate that on your piece of paper.

*If you have Kinetic Sand and paper plates, you can pour some sand on a plate for each person, and draw that word in your sand.

Discussion Questions:

- Does it surprise you that Jesus was able to be kind to everyone involved in this story?
- Can you remember a time when you needed someone to be kind to you? Can you describe that time?
- What are some ways you can be kind to others who might mess up?

ENCOUNTERING GOD TOGETHER:

Say: "May we pray together as a family..."

Let us share our prayers for the world: for our country and leaders, for other countries and their leaders...

Let us share our prayers for the church, ministers, and spiritual leaders...

Let us share our prayers for our teachers, first responders, friends, and others in the community...

Let us share our prayers for our family and our own specific needs..."

If you would like to record the people for whom you pray, use the next few lines to do so:

*You can also record these requests in a family prayer journal if you are using one.

ENCOUNTERING TRANSFORMATION TOGETHER:

Pray aloud together:

God, we welcomed you here and read Your Word,
we prayed and we spent time with you,
we rested in your love for us,
and we did this all together.

Now, we promise to love one another and others as you love us.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Blessing One Another for our Encounters with the World:

- Invite family members to bless one another using any of the examples below or their own blessings.

Examples:

- "I love you. God loves you. I pray God blesses you."
- "God loves you exactly like you are—and so do I."
- "I love the gifts God has given you and how you bless the world with them."

DAILY REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Please answer these during your personal devotional time at the end of the day or do it as a couple or family.

Where have you seen God today? For the children, we say, "what made you happy today?"

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What broke your heart or made you sad today?

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What good thing did you do for someone else today?

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What are you thankful for today?

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