

Meekness *in the Crucible*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Ezek. 24:15–27, Exod. 32:1–14, Matt. 5:43–48, 1 Pet. 2:18–25, Ps. 62:1–8.

Memory Text: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”
(Matthew 5:5, NKJV).

We don't hear the word *meek* used much, except maybe when reading about Moses or studying the Beatitudes. It's not hard to figure out why, either. Meekness is defined as “enduring injury with patience and without resentment.” No wonder we don't hear much about it; it's hardly a trait well respected in cultures today. Sometimes the Bible translates this word as “humble.” Again, humility isn't a character trait seen as desirable by most cultures either.

But meekness, enduring injury with patience and without resentment, is one of the most powerful characteristics of Jesus and His followers. And yet, it's not an end in itself: meekness of spirit can be a powerful weapon in the hands of those who are in the midst of pain and suffering. Indeed, the crucible is a great place to learn meekness of heart, for through our own meekness and broken places we can be powerful witnesses for God.

The Week at a Glance: What is the relationship between suffering and meekness? How can we, in our own meekness and broken places, be a witness to others? How can meekness really be a strength, not a weakness, for the Christian?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 3.

“Broken Bread and Poured-Out Wine”

Consider: Oswald Chambers has said that we are to become “broken bread and poured-out wine” for others. What do you think he means by this?

All through the Bible there are examples of people who were “broken” to serve others. Moses was called to endure unending waves of gossip and criticism as he led people to the Promised Land. Joseph was called to a journey that involved betrayal and imprisonment as he was brought to a position of service in Egypt. In each case, God permitted the situations in order that His people’s lives could become theaters of His grace and care, not only for themselves but also for the good of others, as well. God may use us in the same way. It is easy to feel angry or hurt in such situations. But as we noted yesterday, meekness is the God-given ability to endure such things “with patience and without resentment.”

Read Ezekiel 24:15–27. What’s happening here? Why was Ezekiel put through this crucible?

In Ezekiel 24:24, God says, “ ‘Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD’ ” (NIV). Through Ezekiel’s example, the people of Israel were going to be convicted of the truth about who God was, the Sovereign Lord—and they would see this truth as they experienced the fulfillment of the prophecy that Ezekiel’s life symbolized and the suffering that he had faced. Who knows how many people will see “the Sovereign LORD” through us in our own broken places, as well?

Sooner or later life itself breaks us all. What has been your experience with being broken? What lessons have you learned? How can your own broken soul be used by the Lord to help other people?

Interceding for Grace

Read Exodus 32:1–14. What role do we find Moses playing here?

After the people began worshiping the golden calf, God decided they had gone too far and announced that He would destroy the people and make Moses a great nation. But rather than taking up God’s offer, Moses pleaded for God to show grace to His people, and God relented.

Exodus 32:1–14 raises two important issues. First, God’s offer to destroy the rebellious people and bless Moses was a test for him. God wanted Moses to demonstrate just how much compassion he felt for these desperately disobedient people. And Moses passed the test. Like Jesus, he pleaded for mercy for sinners. This reveals something very interesting: sometimes God also may allow us to face opposition; He might allow us to be in a crucible so that He, we, and the watching universe can see how much compassion we have for those who are wayward.

What reasons did Moses give for asking the Lord not to destroy Israel?

Second, this passage shows that opposition and disobedience is a call to reveal grace. Grace is needed when people least deserve it. But when they least deserve it also is the time that we feel the least like offering it. But when Moses’ sister Miriam was criticizing him, he cried out to the Lord to heal her from leprosy (*Numbers 12*). When God was angry with Korah and his followers and threatened to destroy them all, Moses fell on his face to plead for their lives. The next day, when Israel grumbled against Moses for the death of the rebels and God threatened to destroy them all again, Moses fell facedown and urged Aaron quickly to make atonement for them all (*Numbers 16*). In his own meekness, in his own selflessness in the midst of this crucible, Moses sought grace on behalf of those who certainly didn’t deserve it.

Think about the people around you who you think are the least deserving of grace. How can you, with meekness and selfless humility, be a revelation of God’s grace to them?

Loving Those Who Hurt Us

Someone once said: “Loving our enemies, then, does not mean that we are supposed to love the dirt in which the pearl is buried; rather it means that we love the pearl which lies in the dust. . . . God does not love us because we are by nature lovable. But we become lovable because He loves us.”

When you look at your “enemies,” what do you normally see—the pearl or the dirt around it?

Read Matthew 5:43–48. Jesus calls us to love and pray for our enemies. What example from nature does Jesus give us there that helps us understand why we should love our enemies? What’s the point He is teaching us?

In Matthew 5:45, Jesus uses the example of His Father in heaven to illustrate how we should treat those who hurt us, who perhaps put us in the worst kind of crucibles. Jesus says that His Father sends the blessing of rain to both the righteous and the unrighteous; if God gives even the unjust rain, how then should we treat them?

Jesus isn’t trying to say that we should always have warm, fuzzy feelings toward everyone who causes us trouble, though this also may be possible. Fundamentally, love for our enemies is not meant to be a feeling we have for them but specific actions toward them that reveal care and consideration.

Jesus concludes this passage with a verse that often causes a lot of debate: “ ‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’ ” (*Matt. 5:48, NIV*). But the meaning is very clear in the context: those people who want to be perfect as God is perfect must show love to their enemies as God shows love to His. To be perfect in God’s sight is to love the opposition; and to do this takes a meekness of heart that only God can give.

Keeping in mind our definition of meekness (“enduring injury with patience and without resentment”), list the changes you must make in order to allow the Lord to give you the kind of meekness of heart that will help you have the right attitude toward “enemies.”

A Closed Mouth

The most powerful examples of meekness in the crucible come from Jesus. When He said to come and “learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (*Matt. 11:29*), He meant it in ways we probably can’t imagine.

Read 1 Peter 2:18–25. Peter is offering some surprising advice to slaves. He describes how Jesus responded to unjust and painful treatment and suggests to them that He has left them “an example, that you should follow His steps” (*1 Pet. 2:21, NKJV*). What principles of meekness and humility in the crucible can we learn from Jesus’ example, as expressed here by Peter?

It is terrible to watch someone else treat another unjustly. And it is extremely painful when we are on the receiving end of such treatment. Because we normally have a strong sense of justice, when injustice occurs, our instincts are to “put things right” while holding on to what we believe to be a righteous and just anger.

It is not easy to live meekly. It is perhaps impossible unless we embrace one critical truth—that in all unjust situations, we must believe that our Father in heaven is in control and that He will act on our behalf when it is according to His will. This also means that we must be open to the possibility that like Jesus, we may not always be saved from injustice. But we must always remember that our Father in heaven is still with us and in charge.

Peter’s advice, modeled on Jesus’ life, is surprising because it seems that silence in the face of unjust suffering is a greater witness to the glory of God than “putting people right.” When questioned by Caiaphas and Pilate, Jesus could have said a lot of things to correct the situation and to justify Himself, but He didn’t. His silence was a testimony to His meekness.

How do you deal with situations in which you have been treated unfairly? How can you better apply some of the principles looked at here today to your own life?

Our Rock and Refuge

So often the most proud people, the most arrogant and pushy, are those who suffer from low self-esteem. Their arrogance and pride—and total lack of meekness or humility—exist as a cover, perhaps even unconsciously, for something lacking inside. What they need is something we all need: a sense of security, of worthiness, of acceptance, especially in times of distress and suffering. We can find that only through the Lord. In short, meekness and humility, far from being attributes of weakness, are often the most powerful manifestation of a soul firmly grounded on the Rock.

Read Psalm 62:1–8. What seems to be the background for this psalm? What points is David making? What spiritual principles can you learn from what he is saying? Most important, how can you learn to apply these principles to your own life?

“Without cause men will become our enemies. The motives of the people of God will be misinterpreted, not only by the world, but by their own brethren. The Lord’s servants will be put in hard places. A mountain will be made of a molehill to justify men in pursuing a selfish, unrighteous course. . . . By misrepresentation these men will be clothed in the dark vestments of dishonesty because circumstances beyond their control made their work perplexing. They will be pointed to as men that cannot be trusted. And this will be done by the members of the church. God’s servants must arm themselves with the mind of Christ. They must not expect to escape insult and misjudgment. They will be called enthusiasts and fanatics. But let them not become discouraged. God’s hands are on the wheel of His providence, guiding His work to the glory of His name.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 177.

How immune are you to the reproaches and barbs of others? Most likely not that immune, right? How can you cleave to the Lord and anchor your sense of self-worth on the One who loves you so much that He died for your sins, and thus help protect yourself against the slights of others?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Importance of Seeking True Knowledge,” pp. 453, 454, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Worker and His Qualifications,” p. 630, in *Evangelism*.

“The difficulties we have to encounter may be very much lessened by that meekness which hides itself in Christ. If we possess the humility of our Master, we shall rise above the slights, the rebuffs, the annoyances, to which we are daily exposed, and they will cease to cast a gloom over the spirit. The highest evidence of nobility in a Christian is self-control. He who under abuse or cruelty fails to maintain a calm and trustful spirit robs God of His right to reveal in him His own perfection of character. Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the followers of Christ; it is the token of their connection with the courts above.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 301.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does humility allow us to “rise above” hurts and annoyances? What do you think is the most important characteristic of humility that allows us to do this?
- 2 In your own particular culture, how are the characteristics of humility and meekness viewed? Are they respected, despised, or what? What kind of pressures do you face in your culture that work against you in cultivating these characteristics?
- 3 Are there any great examples of meekness and humility among people alive today? If so, who are they, how have they expressed these traits, and what can you learn from them?
- 4 Why is it that we so often equate meekness and humility with weakness?
- 5 We saw how David sought the Lord as a refuge. But how does that work? How is that refuge always manifested? In other words, how can we, as a church, be a refuge for those who need a refuge? What kind of refuge does your own local church provide? What can you do to help make it a place of refuge for those who need it?

Part 10: Power of a Name

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Father was awakened by invisible hands clutching his throat in Manaus, Brazil. Futilely he tried to pull away the hands. Finally, he gasped, “Lord, please help me!” But the deadly grip tightened. When all hope seemed lost, he heard a soft voice say, “Ask Jesus to help. Say the name of Jesus.”

“Jesus, save me!” Father cried. The unseen hands immediately released their grip. Father, gasping, understood the power of Jesus’ name for the first time. Still lying in bed, he exclaimed joyfully, “I am saved by the name of Jesus! I am saved by the blood of Jesus and Jesus’ sacrifice!” From that day, Father called on Jesus’ name whenever evil spirits harassed him.

As baptismal studies continued, Father was astonished to learn that God condemns the spiritism that he had practiced in the Candomblé temple. In Deuteronomy 18:9–14, he read, “There shall not be found among you anyone . . . who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord” (*verses 10, 11, NKJV*). In the Ten Commandments, he read, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (*Exodus 20:3, NKJV*). He thought, *I was worshipping other gods*. Continuing the chapter, he read, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image” (*verse 4, NKJV*), and told himself, “I have been following everything that God calls an abomination.” When he reached the Fourth Commandment—“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy”—he told Mother, “I got the wrong day. The spirits told me to keep another day holy.”

In Revelation 21:8, he read, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” It was the same verse that Mother read when she first went to Sabbath School and that had prompted her to start praying for Father. When Father read the verse, he realized that he had been headed for the lake of fire.

Father reached a breakthrough when the Bible study focused on the state of the dead. He read that people sleep after death and do not have spirits that fly around. “The body dies, and that’s the end,” he told Mother with surprise. “The gift of life is what goes back to God.” The evil spirits had taught that people’s spirits float around after their bodies die and some of those spirits were among the legion of evil spirits that accompanied Candomblé leaders.

The evil spirits continued to annoy Father. But the more they attacked, the more Father called on the name of Jesus. A desire grew in him to lead others to Christ. *Instead of teaching people the way of darkness*, he thought, *I should use my knowledge and own experience to guide people to the light*.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *Matthew 5:5*

Study Focus: *Exod. 32:1–14, Ps. 62:1–8, Ezek. 24:15–27, Matt. 5:43–48, 1 Pet. 2:18–25.*

Part I: Overview

Biblical religion, in both the Old and the New Testaments, is characterized by meekness. Moses is known for being the meekest person on earth (*Num. 12:3*). David declared that “the meek shall inherit the earth” (*Ps. 37:11, NKJV*). The prophets announced that God will bless the meek (*Isa. 11:4; Isa. 29:19; Isa. 66:2; Zeph. 2:3; Zeph. 3:11, 12*). God Himself is described as meek and as promoting meekness (*Ps. 25:9, Ps. 45:4, Ps. 147:6*). Jesus was meek (*Matt. 11:29, Matt. 21:5, 2 Cor. 10:1*) and placed meekness at the foundation of Christianity (*Matt. 5:5*). The apostles were meek (*2 Cor. 10:1*) and urged Christians to be meek (*Gal. 5:23, Eph. 4:2, Col. 3:12, 1 Tim. 6:11, 2 Tim. 2:25, Titus 3:2, James 1:21, James 3:13, James 4:6, 1 Pet. 3:15, 1 Pet. 5:5*). While the empires and kingdoms of the earth are constructed on such values as audacity, power, and military conquest, the religion of God builds and conquers with meekness, love, and grace. However, God’s meekness does not mean that He is powerless. Rather, meekness is an essential trait of God’s character and His way of relating to the universe and to us sinners.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two major themes.

1. Meekness is essential to Christianity. However, just as essential is a correct understanding of biblical meekness and living it out in our lives. Biblical meekness does not spring out of a political calculation; rather, it is a genuine outlook on the world through the prism of God’s most fundamental attribute, love.
2. Christians are not meek in and of themselves. Rather, their source of meekness is in their loving, gracious Three-in-One God: the Father; the Son and Savior, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit.

Part II: Commentary

Is Meekness Slave Morality?

One of the strongest attacks on Christianity and its concept of humility and meekness in the modern period came from the German existentialist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Not only was suffering an integral part of Nietzsche’s life, but it also was an essential area of inter-

est in his philosophy. At a very young age, he lost his father and many other members of his family. Throughout his life, Nietzsche struggled with debilitating health issues and was eventually isolated by a mental illness during the last 11 years of his life. As he studied classical languages and philosophy, Nietzsche became especially interested in ancient Greek culture and philosophy. From this lens, he concluded that Europe had lost its ancient vigor. The culprit? None other than Christianity! Nietzsche thought Christianity had robbed Europe of its classical Greek and Roman culture of heroism, power, and nobility. The West, indeed, humanity in its entirety, according to Nietzsche, needed to redeem that classical outlook if it wanted to survive and thrive.

According to Nietzsche, there are two types of morality: the morality of the masters, of the noblemen, of the strong-willed man, and the morality of the slaves or of the weak. Master morality sets its own values, decides on its own course of actions, and evaluates them through the prism of their consequences, such as helpful (good) or harmful (bad). Thus, autonomy, power, wealth, nobility, optimism, exuberance, and courage are regarded as good, while weakness and meekness are regarded as bad. By contrast, slave morality does not generate values or actions but merely reacts to, and opposes, the values or actions set by the master morality. While master morality focuses on action, slave morality is reactionary (or, as Nietzsche would put it, resentment); while master morality is oppressive, slave morality is subversive and manipulative; while master morality is more individualistic, slave morality is more communitarian.

Thus, because the weak are unable to overthrow the powerful by sheer force, they resort to reinterpreting and disparaging the value system of the masters. Instead of enjoying the morality of the strong man, the weak project their situation of humiliation into the absolute, universalizing their values.

According to Nietzsche, Christianity is a religion of the weak, of slave morality. In his own words: “Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, failed; it has made an ideal out of whatever contradicts the preservation instincts of a strong life; it has corrupted the reason of even the most spiritual natures by teaching people to see the highest spiritual values as sinful, as deceptive, as *temptations*. The most pitiful example—the corruption of Pascal, who believed that his reason was corrupted by original sin when the only thing corrupting it was Christianity itself!”—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 5.

For Nietzsche, Christianity is another reaction of the poor and weak, designed to overthrow and control the powerful through manipulation. Christians have resigned themselves to their fate of slavery and do not have the will to become masters of their own destiny. For this reason,

they hypocritically denounce as sinful what the powerful people have and exalt as virtue what Christians cannot have, imposing their new morality onto all humans. Thus, because Christians could not overpower the rich and the powerful by other means, they devised a way to control the strong with their morality. In this Christian morality, for instance, Christians would convert their inescapable weakness and submission to other people into the virtue of obedience. And the Christians' inability to take revenge would impel Christians to invent the virtue of forgiveness. Likewise, they would design other virtues, such as piety, love, reciprocity, and equality. No matter how noble these virtues may seem to many, for Nietzsche, Christian morality was unacceptable, irrational, and repulsive, because, in his view, Christians used these virtues to reverse the morality of the strong and noble man of this world, to enslave and even oppress him. To Nietzsche, Christian morality keeps people under control, keeps them in obscurity, and makes them ordinary, unexceptional.

Obviously, Nietzsche's criticism of Christian morality and its fundamental concept of meekness is a lamentably wrong understanding of Christianity. The Christian virtue of meekness does not spring out of powerlessness—but out of God's power, justice, and love. When Jesus was taken to the Jewish court and one official slapped Him, Jesus demanded an answer for that unjust act (*John 18:23*). The Gospels make it clear that Jesus died on the cross, not because He did not have any way of escaping (*Matt. 26:53*) but because He voluntarily and lovingly gave His life for our salvation (*John 10:17, 18; John 18:4–11; John 19:11; Phil. 2:6–9*). Christian meekness is the result not of fear but of love.

Paul teaches Christians to live “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (*Eph. 4:2*). Paul explains that we rejoice in our suffering and know that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts” (*Rom. 5:5, NKJV*). Paul further clarifies that God manifested His love to us when we were powerless and rebellious (*Rom. 5:6–8*). John affirms this Bible truth when he declares, “We love Him because He first loved us” (*1 John 4:19, NKJV*).

By describing humans as powerless, Paul does not denigrate humanity, but, rather, describes the reality of the human condition (*see also Rom. 3:26, Romans 7*). The Bible does not regard human powerlessness as class struggle—but, rather, depicts all humans as powerless in the face of sin and death. Also, biblical Christianity does not falsely denigrate humanity in order to deceive them into making people cry out to God for grace. Rather, the Bible realistically describes the sinful condition of human beings and portrays a God who voluntarily and lovingly humbles Himself to save an arrogant, rebellious humanity (*John 1:11, 12; John 3:16*).

As someone said, it takes strength to be meek! And it takes divine

power to love sinful, arrogant, rebellious people! Perhaps one of the most memorable examples of Jesus' meekness was His prayer on the cross for the people who crucified Him and were mocking Him: " 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' " (*Luke 23:34, NKJV; see also Matt. 12:15–20, Acts 8:32, 1 Pet. 2:21–23*). Meekness is part of the fruit of the Spirit; it is God's empowering us to overcome the crucibles of this world.

Moses' Meekness and God's Wrath

How could Moses, the servant of God, be designated the meekest person ever to walk the earth, while at the same time the Bible portrays God as full of wrath? We need to understand that God's wrath is not the opposite of meekness. The divine wrath is God's reaction to, and His repulsion toward, sin. But God genuinely loves the sinner. If God were arrogant, He would not have waited about sixteen hundred years for the antediluvians to return to Him. Neither would He have waited for more than four hundred years for the Canaanites to fill up the cup of their iniquity. Nor would He have waited some fifteen hundred years for the Israelites to be faithful to Him. Likewise, God would not have waited some two thousand years for Christians to fulfill their mission. An arrogant god would have exterminated each of these entities immediately. But God addresses each of them in love and hope, calling them to return to a relationship with Him.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Our God is a perfect communicator. He tells people openly and comprehensibly what He likes and what He does not like. Thus, God leaves us in no doubt as to His feelings about sin: He rejects it. At the same time, God does not humiliate the sinner with the purpose of subjugating him or her. Rather, God talks about the situation generated by sin; at the same time, He provides solutions. Yes, His reaction against sin is unequivocal, but so is His invitation to sinners to be reconciled to Him. Think of how you can be meek, yet denunciatory of sin in your life and in the lives of your family and community members.**

2. Think about the idea that our life is a theater for the other worlds to see and learn. Share with the Sabbath School group your feelings when thinking about this idea. How does your life change when you are aware of this larger picture?

Notes


