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Vol 14 • Issue 9

THE WINNING PLAY

Passing the test

The Stuff Heaven Is Made of

A dad's influence

How to Have a Happier Home

Mealtimes will never be the same





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TENDER STRENGTH

In our series on the fruits of the Spirit, we've reached the eighth fruit, named *prautes* in the original Greek text—and as it turns out, that's a particularly tricky word to interpret. In his commentary on Galatians 5:23, Scottish theologian William Barclay (1907–1978) went so far as to say that “*prautes* is the most

untranslatable of words in the New Testament.” It's been translated variously as “meekness” and “gentleness.”

In the course of working on this issue, I've compiled my personal definition of what the concept means to me. Here it is, briefly:

Submission to God: Jesus is the perfect example of being entirely devoted to doing God's will, whatever the cost. Even when faced with His impending arrest and execution, He told His Father, “I want your will to be done, not mine.”¹

Meekness means thinking less of what I want and more of what God wants.

Readiness to learn: If the Italian physicist, mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) could say, “I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him,” then how much more is that true for *me!*

Meekness means never thinking I know enough or that I'm too good or exalted to learn from others.

Consideration: When Moses' own brother and sister attacked his position as leader of the Israelites, he remained gentle toward them and let God deal with the situation. Even after God had vindicated him, his only concern was for Miriam to be forgiven and healed.²

Gentleness is never self-important, and it is always kind and courteous.

Anger at injustice: Aristotle defined *prautes* as a perfect balance between getting angry without reason and not getting angry at all.

Gentleness is never hateful, but neither is it wimpy. It's getting indignant at the right time, in the right measure, and for the right reasons.

In this issue, there are articles relating to all these aspects of gentleness. See if you can match them.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Matthew 26:39 NLT 2. See Numbers 12:1–16.

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THE WINNING PLAY

BY DENNIS EDWARDS

IN MY JUNIOR YEAR AT COLLEGE, I was elected coach of my fraternity's football team. My first and most important decision was to appoint our quarterback (QB), the player (in American football) who calls the plays and organizes the offensive. I wanted a QB who would listen to my advice and who was respected by the other players, and of course, he also needed to be able to pass the ball, run, and be a good all-round athlete.

There was quite a bit of pressure on me from my fraternity. Most thought Levy should be QB. He was a talented athlete, very agile, fast, and had the strongest arm. Besides that, he was a senior, which some felt should give him precedence over the other candidates. O'Neil was another possibility, a junior but a great athlete, tall, strong, and another great throwing arm. However, both Levy and O'Neil had big mouths and tended to offend others, whereas we needed

our quarterback to be someone who would bring unity to the team.

I ended up choosing Terry, a quieter young man who was also a good athlete, but not as obviously talented as Levy or O'Neil were. From my point of view, it was not really a difficult decision to make, but I did get some criticism from the other players' supporters.

In the end, though, we had a fantastic run. During our two undefeated years, I used Levy as halfback who often ran with the ball and O'Neil as fullback. Both of them got opportunities to put their throwing skills to use, and many of our players were elected Inter-fraternity League All-Stars.

What I learned from my experience as football coach was that the showy, loud-mouthed personalities are not necessarily the best for leading a team. Even a quieter player like Terry, working in cooperation with his coach, could do an excellent job and

promote unity and teamwork, which is just what a team needs to win.

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Teamwork is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.—*Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919), American industrialist*

Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.—*Michael Jordan (b. 1963), American former basketball player, considered the greatest player of all time*

No member of a crew is praised for the rugged individuality of his rowing.—*Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), American poet*



The Stuff Heaven Is Made of

A tribute to my father

BY MARINA GRUENHAGE

I DON'T WANT TO PUT MY FATHER ON A PEDESTAL. He wouldn't have wanted that. He was always self-effacing, and I can't remember him ever seeking honor for himself. When someone would praise him, he'd point heavenward, to his Creator, and give God the glory.

When he was still around, I didn't treasure him as I should have. I assumed that all dads were as kind and sacrificial as mine. I didn't appreciate his longsuffering nature, nor did I respect his convictions. Instead, I put him down many times, insensitive to the pain I caused him. Now, many years after his death, I realize what a jewel of a dad I had.

Papa was born in Germany in 1893 and was old enough to have

been my grandfather by the time I came along.

He was drafted into service during WW1, and despite frequent opposition, he continued to talk about Jesus at every opportunity.

"On one occasion," Papa recounted, "one of the officers grabbed my Bible to look for a certain verse that he and his companions wanted to tease me with. They weren't able to find the verse, but they did find my prayer list tucked between the pages, and read it eagerly. To their astonishment, they found their names written there." Those rough, proud men humbly returned his Bible and apologized. From that moment on, they didn't tease him again.

Papa also told us about an officer who had been part of the mocking crowd and often cracked jokes at my

dad's expense. On the battlefield, however, he stayed close to my father. "Why are you always hiding behind me?" Papa asked him once. "I'm not bulletproof!"

This time the officer spoke sincerely and without scorn. "There is so much peace around you. For some reason, when I'm near you, I feel safe."

Papa's voice would fill with emotion as he talked about a 19-year-old soldier who panicked before a major battle. Papa told the boy about Jesus—the One who faced His fears and gave His life for us—and they prayed together. The young soldier then marched bravely into the battle, knowing it would probably cost him his life. When they found his body later, his face bore the most peaceful expression. Clutched to his chest was the tract Papa had given him. The

text concluded with this verse from the Bible: "The eternal God is your refuge, and His everlasting arms are under you."¹

After the war, Papa began studying to become a pastor, but had to give up his dream in order to help his parents during the financial crisis. With a family to support, he was never able to resume his studies. However, this didn't hinder him from continuing to share God's love wherever he went. He founded a Sunday school, and often stood in for the pastor at his local church. Visiting the sick and lonely was one of his favorite pastimes.

I was the youngest of six children. When I was small, Papa and I adored each other and spent countless precious moments together. But when I grew older and turned my back on God's love and the faith of my

parents, it broke Papa's heart. I barely communicated with him during my teen years, as I didn't want to hear any of the sermons I expected him to preach.

So Papa opted to remain silent, while Mom and I argued a lot. "Why do you talk so much *with* our daughter?" Papa would ask her. "It might be better to talk with God *about* her!" Sometimes my heart cringed at the way he would look at me, his eyes full of sorrow. Our sweet father-daughter relationship had faded, and he found the hurt hard to bear. I felt miserable too, but didn't want to admit it, so I put on a tough front.

Papa talked to God about me, and God listened. At the age of 21, I experienced a miraculous transformation. Like a prodigal daughter, I returned to Jesus and asked Him to come into my life.

Papa was so glad. What a joyful reunion we had! Mom told me how over the years he had not ceased to pray desperately and with determination. Thank you, Papa, for holding on for me.

When Papa passed away, a short article about him appeared in a local newspaper. It concluded, "It's a rare thing to encounter such heartfelt kindness and patience as Mr. Gruenhagen showed to others. Those who met him could feel that 'he had been with Jesus' (Acts 4:13)."

In his own humble way, Papa was a saint—the sort that heaven is made of.

MARINA GRUENHAGE (1947–2005) WAS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL FOR OVER 30 YEARS, MUCH OF THAT TIME SPENT IN JAPAN. ■



Appreciation ▶ in the Workplace

BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED

APPRECIATION IS A HUMAN NEED. It's not just something that's nice to have when possible, but something that each person needs in order to be happy and to thrive. That's true in every setting, but it's perhaps nowhere more evident than in the workplace. When people feel genuinely appreciated by those they work for and with, they're much more likely to be excellent contributors and "team players."

When there's lots of appreciation flowing between team members, this significantly boosts the chances of that team becoming a winning team. Appreciation has the power to bring out the best in people. It makes them want to do more, stretch more, contribute more, feel like they're capable of more, and be content in the role they play. If everyone on the team appreciates one another, respects one another, and shows faith

in one another, this multiplies the overall productivity and happiness of the team.

It's definitely to your advantage to take the time to appreciate those you work with. It will make you happier, because appreciation is a form of love, and love has a way of returning to those who bestow it. It will make the recipients of the appreciation happier, because it will brighten their lives. And if everyone's appreciating everyone, then the workplace will be a happier place, everyone will work better, and more will be accomplished.

Thinking positive thoughts about one another is good; it's a start, but if we don't express those thoughts, if we don't verbalize them, they won't do anyone else any good. We can't expect people to read our minds. We have to put those thoughts into words or actions.

No matter what may have held you back from giving sincere and regular appreciation in the past, you can begin today to bring out the best in others by pointing it out. There's so much that we can appreciate others for, and it means so much to people when someone takes an interest in them and notices unique and special things about them. Let's not only appreciate things that are the most obvious, and that we benefit from the most, but let's try to expand our "appreciation horizons" by looking for the other less apparent things that we are sure to find if we make the effort.

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER AMSTERDAM, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ■

TEAMWORK AND SYNERGY

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA V.

OFTEN WHEN PEOPLE THINK OF LEADERSHIP, the image of the strong, self-assured, authoritative leader comes to mind—the man who uses his charismatic style to drive his team or company to success.

In today's world, though, good managers realize that they can't bring success to their business entirely through their own ideas, drive, and talents. Adopting and maintaining a sense of community is an essential factor in the progress of organizations, and a wise leader multiplies his efforts by relying on the capabilities and talents of his entire team.

Three thousand years ago, when Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, saw that Moses was personally holding court to settle disputes within the camp, he gave him the following advice:

You are not doing this right. You will wear yourself out and these people as well. This is too much for you to do alone.

Now let me give you some good advice. It is right for you to represent the people before God and bring their disputes to him. You should teach them God's commands and explain to them how they should live and what they should do.

But in addition, you should choose some capable men and appoint them as leaders of the people. Let them serve as judges. They can bring all the difficult cases to you, but they can decide all the smaller disputes. That will make it easier for you, as they share your burden.

If you do this, you will not wear yourself out, and all these people can go home with their disputes settled.¹

1. Exodus 18:18–23 GNT, condensed
2. Matthew 18:19–20 ESV

The role of teamwork in the success of any initiative is clear. Even our prayers have more power when we join together to pray with others. "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."²

It takes many hands to build anything that is to last. Accomplished teams share a common goal and have a mission that reaches over and above the objectives of the individuals within the team. It is this collective vision, the cooperation and melding of talents that empowers the team so that the results are greater than the sum of the individual efforts or capabilities. In unity there is strength.

GABRIEL GARCÍA V. (ALSO CREDITED AS GABRIEL SARMIENTO) IS THE EDITOR OF *CONÉCTATE*, THE SPANISH EDITION OF *ACTIVATED*. ■

Our Humble Savior



LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT HOW JESUS' CHARACTER IS MANIFESTED THROUGH SOME OF THE KEY EVENTS IN HIS LIFE.

BORN IN A BARN

[Mary] wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.—*Luke 2:7 ESV*

REJECTED BY MANY

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.—*John 1:10–11 NLT*

HIS TRIUMPHANT ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey.—*Matthew 21:5*

THE FOOT WASHING

[Jesus] poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples'

feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you."—*John 13:5, 12–15 NLT*

SILENT IN THE FACE OF HIS ACCUSERS

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.—*Isaiah 53:7*

MOCKED BY EVIL MEN

They spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the

robe and put his own clothes on him again. The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery.—*Matthew 27:30–31, 39 NLT*

CRUCIFIED WITH COMMON CRIMINALS

Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.—*Matthew 27:38*

STOOPED TO OUR LEVEL

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.—*Philippians 2:5–7 NIV*

If you haven't met the humble Savior, you can right now. He stands at your heart's door, waiting for you to invite Him in. Simply pray, "Jesus, please come in and give me Your gift of eternal life. Amen." ■



BY TINA KAPP

THE BEST HIGH-AND-LOW EXPERIENCE I HAD WAS WHEN I WAS LIVING IN UGANDA AND JOINED A MISSION TO THE FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS IN GULU, the same kids you see in the movie, *Machine Gun Preacher*.¹ We brought tons of donated food and showed the movie *Jesus*² with a running Acholi translation. We had to use a generator to show the movie on a projector, as there was no electricity.

We stayed in one of the "nicer" huts, which was literally a big mud circle with a concrete wall and an aluminum roof. The toilet was a separate little outhouse, complete with insects of all shapes and sizes. (On one occasion, I counted 18 spiders!) In the evening they brought us one jerry can of boiling water and

1. *Machine Gun Preacher* (2011)
2. *Jesus* (1999)
3. *Philippians* 4:11–12
4. *Philippians* 4:13

another of cold water, and we had to mix them in a third bucket and take our showers behind the hut, under the stars. We ate a lot of interesting food, such as a spread made of blended termites. Not my favorite.

After a few days there, one of my coworkers and I had to return to Kampala. Some good friends of ours, the directors of the main telecom company, were leaving Uganda and we were invited to a big farewell function for them. In just a few hours, we went from blended termite paste to enjoying a multi-course dinner at the Sheraton five-star hotel and watching the biggest celebrity singers in the country perform. My friend and I loved the fact that while getting the royal treatment was wonderful, having come from a place where people had so little and we had to "rough it" made us that much more thankful.

Paul said in *Philippians*, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be



HUMILITY IS NOT THINKING LESS OF YOURSELF, IT'S THINKING OF YOURSELF LESS.—*C. S. LEWIS (1898–1963)*



abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."³ That's what made him truly realize, in the very next verse, "I can do all things through Christ."⁴ He knew it wasn't his own amazingness that accomplished anything, and he gave God the glory for the good he was able to do.

TINA KAPP IS A DANCER, PRESENTER AND FREELANCE WRITER IN SOUTH AFRICA. SHE RUNS AN ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY THAT HELPS RAISE FUNDS FOR CHARITY AND MISSIONARY PROJECTS. ■

Power to the Meek

COMPILED BY SAMUEL KEATING

GOD INSTRUCTS US TO BE MEEK AND HUMBLE IN OUR DEALINGS WITH OTHERS ...

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.—*Ephesians 4:2 NLT*

Try your best to please God and to be like him. Be faithful, loving, dependable, and gentle.—*1 Timothy 6:11 CEV*

Be humble when you correct people who oppose you.—*2 Timothy 2:25 CEV*

God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient.—*Colossians 3:12 CEV*

... AND HE PROMISES TO BLESS US WHEN WE ARE.

The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord.—*Psalm 22:26 KJV*

The Lord lifts up the humble.—*Psalm 147:6*

The Lord is pleased with his people, and he gives victory to those who are humble.—*Psalm 149:4 CEV*

Once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord.—*Isaiah 29:19 NIV*

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.—*Matthew 11:29*

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.—*Matthew 5:3–12*

Be beautiful in your heart by being gentle and quiet. This kind of beauty will last, and God considers it very special.—*1 Peter 3:4 CEV* ■

The meek man will attain a place of soul rest. As he walks on in meekness he will be happy to let God defend him. The old struggle to defend himself is over. He has found the peace which meekness brings.—*A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)*

7 GREAT WAYS TO A HUMBLER YOU

MOST OF US WOULDN'T MIND BEING A LITTLE MORE HUMBLE, but oh, how we hate to be humbled! That hurts our pride, but that kind of pain is good for us if we can welcome it and let it accomplish its purpose. Remember the mantra of Olympians: No pain, no gain!

1 LOOK FOR THE BEST IN PEOPLE. Everyone has had some experience you haven't had and is therefore your superior in that respect. As the American scholar and author George Herbert Palmer (1842–1933) said, "I am defeated, and know it, if I meet any human being from whom I find myself unable to learn anything."

ADMIT YOUR LIMITATIONS AND NEEDS. It's human nature to want to appear strong and self-sufficient, but that usually only makes things harder. Ask for and accept the help of others, and you'll come out miles ahead.

6 LEARN SOMETHING NEW—A NEW SKILL, LANGUAGE, SPORT, OR HOBBY. Starting from scratch is nearly always humbling, but the rewards are manifold. Apart from benefitting from a new skill, your example will encourage others and, contrary to what your pride tells you, win their admiration and respect.

1. Jeremiah 9:23–24 GNT

GIVE SINCERE COMPLIMENTS.

It's hard to look down on others while telling them what you admire about them. The more you put positive thoughts about others into words, the more good you'll see in them and the less likely you will be to fall into the egotism trap.

3 BE QUICK TO ADMIT YOUR MISTAKES AND APOLOGIZE. It's been said that the hardest words to say in any language are "I was wrong" and "I'm sorry." Those who refuse to do so out of pride are likely to keep making the same mistakes and alienate people in the process.

SERVE OTHERS. Volunteer to help the elderly, the infirm, or children, or do some other form of community service. You'll gain more than you give.

7 GIVE GOD THE CREDIT FOR ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT YOU AND ANYTHING GOOD THAT HE HELPS YOU DO.

The Bible instructs: "The wise should not boast of their wisdom, nor the strong of their strength, nor the rich of their wealth. If any want to boast, they should boast that they know and understand me, because my love is constant, and I do what is just and right."¹ ■



GENTLENESS —THE WINSOME FRUIT

BY RAFAEL HOLDING

A GENTLE SPIRIT IS ONE OF THE KEYS TO SUCCESS WITH PEOPLE. It can make all the difference in how open others are to our opinions and ideas.

Jesus is pictured in the Bible as a lamb,¹ a mother hen,² and a gentle, concerned shepherd.³ He said of Himself, “I am gentle and lowly in heart.”⁴ He didn’t force anyone to believe in or follow Him; He showed compassion, and gently wooed people into His heavenly kingdom by His loving example.

If you want to win friends and win others to the Lord, follow His example.⁵ “Be gentle and kind to everyone.”⁶ “Are any of you wise or sensible? Then show it by living right and by being humble and wise in everything you do.”⁷

If this sounds easier said than done, don’t worry. God can help each of us to be more like Jesus in this respect, too, if we let His Holy Spirit work through us.

RAFAEL HOLDING IS A WRITER IN AUSTRALIA. “GENTLENESS—THE WINSOME FRUIT” IS ADAPTED FROM THE *GET ACTIVATED* BOOK *GOD’S GIFTS*, AVAILABLE FROM AURORA’S ONLINE STORE ([HTTP://SHOP.AURORAPRODUCTION.COM/](http://shop.auroraproduction.com/)). ■

1. See John 1:29; Isaiah 53:7.

2. See Luke 13:34.

3. See Isaiah 40:11;
John 10:14–15.

4. Matthew 11:29

5. See 1 Peter 2:21.

6. Titus 3:2 CEV

7. James 3:13 CEV

UNDER CONTROL

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED

I LIKE THE DEFINITION OF MEEKNESS THAT’S IN MY BIBLE DICTIONARY. It says meekness is “an attitude of humility toward God and gentleness toward men, springing from a recognition that God is in control.” It is strength and courage under control, coupled with kindness.

This kind of meekness is having faith and peace, because you know God’s in control. You can be mild and quiet of nature, because you’re full of faith. You have the assurance that God’s going to work things out no matter how incredibly overwhelming or desperate the situation might be.

You have faith, and therefore you have trust. You’re mild because you’re not frantically trying to work up a solution in your own strength. You’re not depending on your own talent, your own wisdom, your own charisma, but on the Lord, and that calmness translates to others as the Lord’s presence right there with you. They know everything’s okay, because you have that meekness, that quietness of spirit about you.

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. “UNDER CONTROL” WAS ADAPTED FROM A BLOG POST TITLED “GODLY CONFIDENCE.” ■

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS



ANGRY WITH EVIL

Q: *I realize that love and humility are Christian virtues, but what about when you see injustice? I sometimes get so upset when I read about some of the terrible things going on in the world. Is it always wrong to be angry?*

A: “Don’t be quick to fly off the handle” is one interpretation of the scriptural advice about anger,¹ but it doesn’t mean that we should never be stirred up about anything.

Think about when Jesus arrived at the temple in Jerusalem. A busy crowd of people thronged the open courtyard. There was such noise and commotion as the stallholders sold their wares: doves and pigeons, sheep and oxen—whatever was

1. Ecclesiastes 7:9 MSG

2. See Matthew 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17;
Luke 19:45–46; John 2:14–16.

3. Ephesians 4:26 CEV

needed for the temple sacrifices. Money changed hands while people bartered, argued, pleaded. It was a seller’s market.

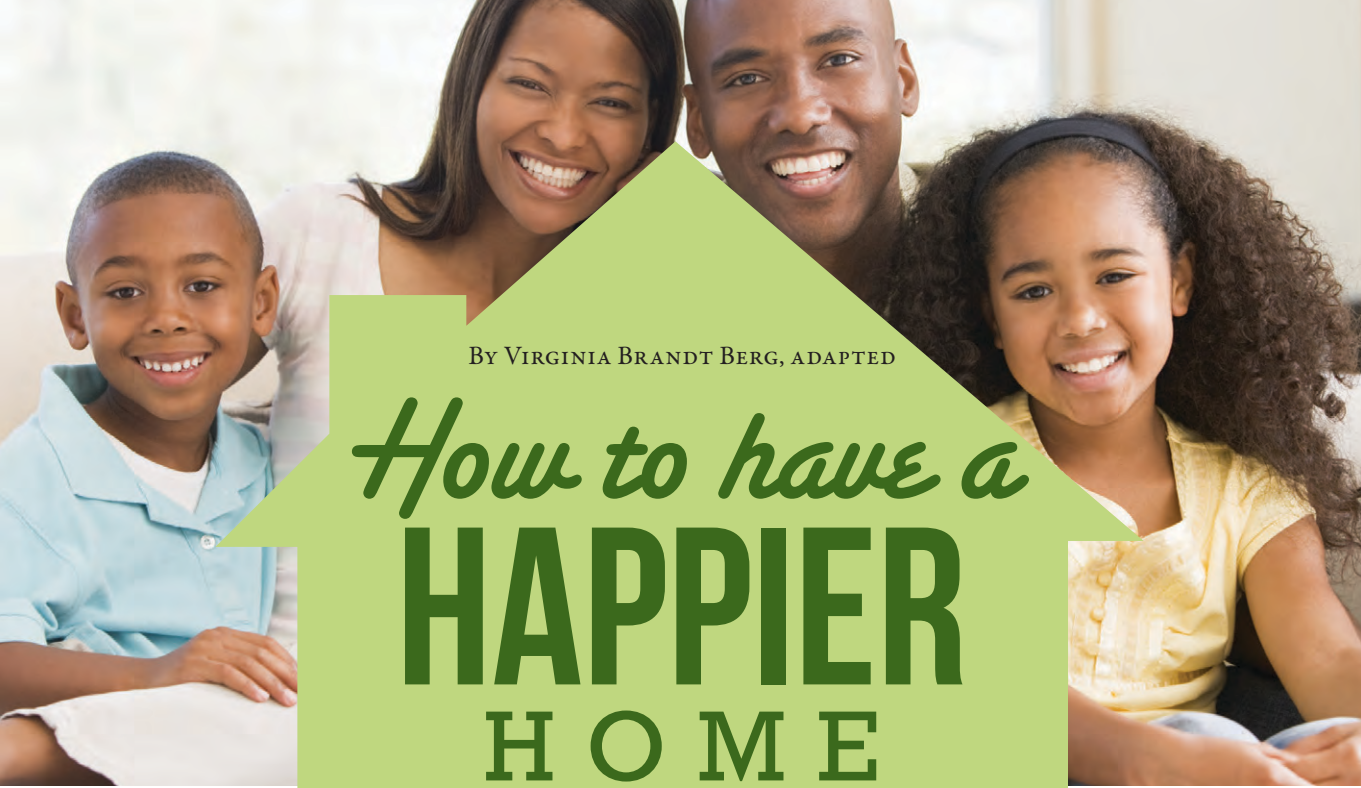
Jesus was outraged. This was meant to be a house of prayer, yet it had been turned into a busy and not entirely honest marketplace. He could have taken the sympathetic position that while the merchants were making a profit, at least they were providing a useful service by supplying what the worshippers needed in order to obey God’s law. Besides, the more people had to pay for their sacrifices, the more highly they’d value them. He could potentially have seen the good in the situation and gone on His way.

But that’s not what He did. The Gospels tell us that Jesus overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those that sold doves,

and rebuked them for turning His Father’s house of prayer into a den of thieves. This incident is recorded in all four Gospels,² which underlines its significance.

There are times when we do need to face up to things that are wrong. This does not mean being angry in our own spirit or that we should literally “overturn the tables.” God’s Word warns, “Don’t get so angry that you sin. Don’t go to bed angry.”³ Still, there are occasions when we should stand up for what is right. Holding to our convictions about truth and justice is part of following Christ.

A man that does not know how to be angry does not know how to be good. Now and then a man should be shaken to the core with indignation over things evil.—*Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)* ■



BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG, ADAPTED

How to have a HAPPIER HOME

ACCORDING TO DR. JAMES H. BOSSARD, a former professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, one of the greatest weaknesses in family life is the way parents talk in front of their children. After studying extensive recordings of table talk, he wrote, “I have found that family after family had definite, consistent conversational habits, and that the *critical* pattern was the most prevalent. These families rarely had a good word to say about anyone. They complained continuously about friends, relatives, neighbors—almost every aspect of their lives, from the lines of people in the supermarket to the stupidity of their bosses.

“This constant negative family atmosphere had a disastrous effect on

1. See Matthew 15:11.
2. Matthew 12:34
3. Matthew 12:35

the children, because a high percentage of [these families’] children were antisocial and unpopular. And this pattern of the family’s hostility many times turned to quarreling amongst themselves. The children absorbed that pattern, and it caused the children trouble.”

“Long ago,” Dr. Bossard continued, “a great Teacher pointed out that what comes out of the mouth is a great deal more important than that which goes in to it.”¹

Jesus also taught that our words reveal our heart’s character. He said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,”² and “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”³ The way to change the quality of our words is to change the spirit from which those words flow. Words flowing from a

soul filled with God’s Spirit of love will have savor and power that comes from their inner depth.

How can you be so filled with the Spirit of Christ that He guides the words you say? It can only happen through you taking time with Him, getting filled with His Spirit and His love. Take time to read His recorded Word in the Bible, and let Him speak to you personally in prayer and reflection.

As you spend time with Jesus, the fountain of all goodness and kindness and gentleness, your relationship with Him will deepen and you’ll soon find your words to be conductors of His Spirit, making you a greater influence for good in the lives of those nearest and dearest to you.

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QUIET MOMENTS

REGAINING THE PLOT

BY ABI MAY

EVER FEEL LIKE YOU’VE “LOST THE PLOT”? You’re reading a novel and can’t quite figure out who is who, or you tuned out during a film and now it doesn’t seem to make sense anymore. Your life is busy, busy, yet sometimes you’re no longer sure who you are or where you’re headed.

Jonah lost the plot when he ran away from God. God had told him to go to Nineveh and deliver a warning; but Jonah didn’t fancy that, and instead he caught a boat headed in the opposite direction. It could have been a voyage into oblivion, as he ended up in the belly of a large fish, but when he turned back to God, God mercifully delivered him. Back on dry

1. See Jonah 1–2.
2. Psalm 119:1 MSG
3. See Genesis 18:1–15.
4. See Hebrews 11:11, Genesis 21:1–2.
5. Psalm 17:5
6. See Luke 22:54–62.
7. See John 21.
8. Psalm 143:8

land, he regained the plot and went on to do what God had asked.¹

Lord, help me stay on track no matter how difficult.

You’re blessed when you stay on course, walking steadily on the road revealed by God.²

Sarah lost the plot when the angelic visitors to her husband Abraham predicted that she would have a child. She laughed about it, thinking that her advanced age was an impossible barrier.³ Still, she rose up to this challenge to her faith, and “she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”⁴ She regained the plot through faith.

Lord, help me to follow You by faith, even when I don’t understand exactly where You’re leading.

Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip.⁵

Peter lost the plot when he denied Jesus and was confused and afraid for his own life.⁶ But all was not lost. A conversation over a breakfast meal prepared by the risen Savior changed Peter’s outlook on himself and his life.⁷ “Take care of My followers,” Jesus told him.—And that’s exactly what Peter did. He regained the plot, and the remainder of his life was meaningful and purposeful.

Lord, help me to sit quietly and listen to Your voice, so that I can find and follow the path You have for me.

Cause me to hear Your loving-kindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You.⁸

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

LEARNING MEEKNESS

Come to Me when you are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest and teach you how to be meek, like I am.¹ The meekness I'm referring to is really strength, but it is manifested with gentleness and kindness. It doesn't need to assert itself or boast, because it knows its strength.

A lot of times people feel they have to put on an act so as to appear stronger and more confident than they are; but that's pretty easy to see through. It's far better in the long run to be honest with yourself and others; honest about your strengths, but also about your weaknesses; honest when you're confident, and honest when you're not. When you know who you are, and most of all when you know who *I* am, when you're true to yourself and authentic in your dealings with others, you can walk in confidence.

When you rest in Me, I refresh and renew you and reconnect you with My strength. Then you are able to meet all the demands that you face—whether pressure or overload at work, relationship challenges, or negative emotions—and deal with them in My strength. When things get busy and hectic and topsy-turvy, it's easy to let yourself get a little gruff or sharp with people, which of course is not being meek and gentle, and which often doesn't get good results or make you feel any better.

Stabilize and strengthen yourself by resting in Me and by learning My meekness of spirit. Then My strength will give you what you need to face and handle and overcome your daily challenges.

1. See Matthew 11:28–29.