

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. We offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement on an answer. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Read Luke 14:7-14 aloud.

1. What were the dinner guests doing as they chose their seats?
What was the significance of having a visible seat near the host?
How did Jesus encourage his followers to select their seats?
What would be the risk of choosing a low seat?
What was Jesus' point? Was he offering a strategy for social advancement or were there deeper reasons?
2. What are Jesus' instructions for those who host dinners?
Why would someone prefer to invite guests who are like them and who can return the favor?
Why would someone invite a guest who could not possibly return the favor? What would you stand to gain?
How do you think this principle applies today?
What might be the risks of inviting poor people or disabled people into your home? What might be the blessings?
How could we as a group help each other live out this passage?
3. In Luke 14, what is Jesus saying about relationships?
Don't view friends or acquaintances as a tool to move ahead.
Philip Kenneson defines gentleness as grounding one's relationships in something other than pride and power. How does this definition of gentleness fit with Luke 14?

What are some relationships that are colored by power or pride?
Employee-supervisor? Social networks? Political rivals?

How does ambition affect the way we treat others who are not climbing the ladder as fast as we are?

How can a believer participate in society yet still be gentle?

What is the problem when someone cannot be gentle? What does it say about the way we view others if we are not gentle with them?
It goes deeper than being "rough around the edges." There is a focus on self and an absence of concern for others.

4. It is easy to see the problem of ambition in the business world. What are some ways people can be competitive at church?

If you feel jealousy toward another Christian, how should you manage your feelings and actions?

5. What are some situations where you need to be aggressive?
When someone is causing harm, when inactivity causes pain.

What are some situations where aggressiveness is not godly?
Disciplining your child in anger, backstabbing to move ahead.

How do you know the difference between godly strength and selfish ambition? How can you be gentle and assertive at the same time?
Yielding to God's way and trusting him. Not taking charge unless it is clearly a calling from God.

6. When you look at Jesus, in what ways was he strong? Gentle? Self-seeking? Ambitious?

When were some times Jesus was gentle rather than aggressive?
Philippians 2:5-8 gives some examples.

III. Cultivating gentleness *Practical suggestions and reflections to help participants connect the discussion to their lives. Challenge each person to try at least one of these this week.*

What is your posture for prayer? How does kneeling help us remember who is in charge?

Make a list of situations where you have some authority. What are godly ways to exercise control? What behaviors should you avoid?

Reflect on ambition – when is it healthy? When is it dangerous?

IV. Other resources

The point – Gentleness requires giving up control of our lives so that we might love others and seek God's ways. It means seeking to love others without worrying about the results.

Prayer. *Creative suggestions for group prayer.*

- ✓ An ancient Christian leader said, “prayer is the seed of gentleness and the absence of anger.” How is this true?
- ✓ Pray for gentleness to replace aggression in our hearts.
- ✓ Pray to cast our cares on God rather than become angry.

Kid-friendly activity

An activity designed to help kids and adults connect the scripture to their lives. Works best when adults participate in the activity with the kids.

Announce that the group will be competing to see who is number 1. Start some competitions – a foot race, who can throw something the farthest, jump on one foot the longest, etc. Go outside for races.

Read Luke 14:7-11 aloud.

Discuss this story. What were the people doing? How did Jesus say his followers should be different? Why?

What happens to our relationships when we compete with each other?

Galatians 5 says the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. How does a competitive spirit make it hard for gentleness to grow in our lives?

Life on the vine: Gentleness

Small group guide based on

Life on the Vine, by Philip Kenneson (IVP, 1999. ISBN 0830822194)

www.saltandlightresources.com

By John Grant, Jon Camp, Trey Finley, and Ben Siburt

Theme: Phil Kenneson defines gentleness as “that strength of character required to ground one’s relationships in something other than pride and power.” We live in a society that values ambition and sees gentleness as weakness. Yet we are striving to allow the Spirit to cultivate the fruit of gentleness in our lives. Help your group to see the strength that comes from gentleness.

Leadership tip: Bring a positive spirit to the group meeting. While the issues we are discussing are serious – even disturbing – be sure to communicate the love of Christ to each person in the group. Smile. Be warm. Laughter is one of the best sounds your group can enjoy.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ What is your favorite competitive sport to play? To watch?
- ❖ Why is gentleness thought to be feminine? Who is a man you admire for his gentleness?
- ❖ The most hurtful thing someone said to me during my teen years was...