

5 Earmarks of True Meekness

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

Perhaps no religious word is more misunderstood than the word meek. Who wants to be meek? The contemporary notion conjures up the image of a person who gets run over, whose backbone has the consistency of a wet noodle. The meek woman becomes a doormat for whoever wants to tromp through her life. The meek man lets everyone walk all over him.

Fortunately, the present idea of meek stands almost opposite to the word “meek” used in the Sermon on the Mount—the Greek word *praus*.

Meaning of the Word

First, the philosopher Aristotle used the word to describe the middle between two extremes. A meek person avoided the extremes of anger or indifference. The meek knew how to handle money: They were neither big spenders nor penny pinchers. They knew when to hold on and when to let go.

Second, meek was used to describe a wild animal which had been tamed. For example, a wild horse has energy, but it's undisciplined. When properly broken, it can take bit and bridle and be ridden. It still has all its verve and spirit, but now that power has been channeled and made useful. The meek horse is not the spiritless plow horse that docilely plods along, but the one that parades or races at the rider's beck and call. Thus, the word meek came to acquire its third meaning: gentle, affable, friendly. The self-disciplined person is easy to get along with.

Meekness Modeled by Jesus

Notice how these meanings for meek come together in the person

of Jesus. He blends strength with gentleness.

1. He's authoritative but humble. To grown men He bids, "Follow me." Unabashedly He says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Yet, with all that authority, He stoops to wash the disciples' feet (John 13) and to remind us that "whoever among you would be greatest must be servant of all" (Mark 10:44).

2. He's righteous but vulnerable. To His critics He says, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46). But His righteousness did not make Him stuffy or distant. Children felt comfortable in His presence, as did tax collectors and prostitutes.

3. He's courageous but prudent. Courage stands midway between recklessness and cowardice. Jesus knew when to head into the wind by "steadfastly set[ting] to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), but also when to prudently withdraw from premature conflict (John 11:54).

4. He's firm but loving. He knew how to strike the right balance. To be firm but not loving is to be rigid and unbending. To be loving and not firm is to be permissive and spoiling. In dealing with the rich young ruler, Jesus both loved him and insisted he maintain His requirement for discipleship (Mark 10:17-23).

5. He's active and dependent. He worked incessantly: teaching, calling, healing, exorcising, confronting, discipling, traveling. No one could ever call Jesus lazy. But He blended into His intense activity absolute reliance upon His Father. Thus, He spent long nights in prayer (Mark 14:32; Luke 6:12), often rising early for seclusion in prayer (Mark 1:35), and praying intensely prior to major events (Matt. 26:38-46; Luke 6:12).

Watching Jesus gives us our best picture of what it means to

be meek. I think of words like tough and tender, strong and flexible. The meek person is not given to erratic behavior or uncontrollable mood swings. Anger is used effectively rather than punitively. There's balance—not all work and not all play—and discipline. The meek do not live in chaos, but under control. They're gentle, pliable, approachable, lovable.

Jesus was strong, but easy to live with. He was strong enough to go all the way to Calvary. Strong enough to look with anger at those who used hurting people as pawns in their religious games (Mark 3:5), or who exploited worshippers for financial gain (Mark 11:15-17). But He was so easy to live with that those closest to Him sat at His feet, ate at the table with Him and even leaned in close for a hug of friendship.

No wonder the meek inherit the earth. The Lord can entrust responsibility to people who are becoming like Him.

George O. Wood *is the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God.*