

Rising Above Stubbornness

If you've ever seen a late-night infomercial, you've probably seen some black and white footage of someone trying to do some simple — yet seemingly impossible — task very badly. Maybe they're scrubbing away at a stubborn stain, loosening a screw that's been stripped, or trying to open an impenetrable pickle jar. If only they had the right tool for the job, then they'd be able to break loose what's stuck!

Now imagine that we've faded to black and white, considering how WE get stuck sometimes — set in our ways and unwilling to budge. How frustrating that must be for God to try and use us when we're too stubborn to yield to him. So, are you living with the heart-hardening condition of stubbornness? Let's consider how to [Rise Above](#) this dangerous and spiritually crippling problem!

Stubborn or Meek

The Greek word often used for stubborn, hard-hearted people is *sklērynomai* (σκληρόνομα). It describes those who refuse to listen, change, or reconsider their position on something. Self-willed and defensive, they often condemn those who practice the same things they are (Rom. 2:1-5) but are unwilling to see their need to change. Stubborn people often react violently when confronted, as they did when Stephen confronted them with the phrase, "*You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears*" (Acts 7:51). Is there a better way?

A lot of folks seem to associate meekness with weakness. We might think of a meek person as a doormat that gets walked over. But Aristotle described *prautes* (πραΰτης) — the Greek word behind it — as the balance "between bad temper and spineless incompetence, between extreme anger and indifference" (TDNT). As misunderstood as meekness is, it's no wonder modern translators update it to "*gentleness*" (e.g. Gal. 5:23) or "*humility*" (Zeph. 2:3). It could describe a tamed and trained animal — even a mighty warhorse — whose fierce strength stays under the control of its rider. And so, as we surrender to God's will, we live with the quiet strength-under-control the Bible calls "meekness."

We learn meekness in the Bible from Moses, who "*was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth*" (Num. 12:3). We see him as either a hot-headed young man or a broken-down, doubtful older man at different moments of his life. But through his continued service to God, Moses learned meekness — the humble strength to stand against Pharaoh (Ex. 5-14), and the patient gentleness to lead an obstinate people (Ex. 16).

And Jesus serves as our ultimate example. Jesus the "*meek and lowly*" gives his meekness as a reason to follow him (Matt. 11:29-30). Which makes perfect sense since a spirit of meekness lets a King have compassion on his people, giving mercy rather than always leading with a rod (cf. 1 Cor. 4:21). He leads his disciples into the blessedness of a meek life (Matt. 5:5) and wants our relationships defined by such a gracious, meek way with one another (Eph. 4:2).

Choosing Meekness

Keep a meek and moldable mind when you hear God's word (James 1:19-21). Meekness epitomizes the ideal learner's attitude. Even the most mature among us can continue growing when we humbly

receive instruction, yielding to its wisdom. The opposite of a meek learner is a defensive, stubborn heart — a perfect recipe for keeping you just as you are, hardening to the pain of correction but also missing the gifts of growth.

Be considerate, courteous, patient, and kind. Flying off the handle and impulsively fighting for our rights can get mistaken for strength. But that's the easy way, not the way of noble character. Meekness points to a different kind of wisdom, teaching us to empty ourselves rather than grasping at status (Phil. 2:5-7). The meek pursue harmony and prioritize people over selfish ambitions (James 3:13-18). They're "*peaceable, gentle, open to reason*" (James 3:17) and "look ... to the interests of others*" (Phil. 2:3-4).

And finally, don't kick against God's direction. While Paul resisted the will of Christ, the Lord appeared to him and said: "*It is hard for you to kick against the goads*" (Acts 26:14). A stubborn horse might fight against the stick used to prod them on. But what does the horse really gain? A lot of pain in their backside! And what do we gain from our "self-determination," when we resist the Lord's leadership? Pain and frustration where we could have God's peace and abundant grace! Our Lord desires to lead you, to bless you, and to mold you into his image, "*both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (Phil. 2:13).

Meekness Toolbox

- **Read** — Matt. 5:3-12; Psalm 37:1-11; Col. 3:12-15
- **Reflect** — Ask yourself, "Is there an area of my life where I'm fighting God rather than yielding?"
- **Request** — Pray to the Lord, "Give me a heart of meekness. As I receive your implanted word, shape my life" (cf. James 1:21).
- **Respond** — Write the words "Blessed are the meek" on a Post-It on your mirror this week.
- **Reach Out** — Ask someone, "Where have you seen the beauty of meekness in others?"

Conclusion

If you see stubbornness and self-will in your life, it's time to deal with it before it calcifies. Trust in God, wait patiently on him, and let him mold you into the person he intends you to be.