

BETTER TOGETHER

When We Practice Kindness

Various Texts

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Big Idea: *We should weave kind expressions into the daily routine of our relationships.*

“A thousand points of light”...do you remember where that came from? It was the theme of the first presidential campaign for the first George Bush. Think of the powerful image suggested in those words. What a contrast it was to the other slogan Mr. Bush used during that campaign. OK...be honest. How did you REALLY feel he talked about his vision for our country to become a “kinder, gentler America”?

At the risk of sounding like an old coot, I'll admit that I was in my late 20s in 1988 when the first George Bush asked people to vote for that vision. Of course, nobody really understood what he meant, either then or now. But the terminology evidently worked – once, anyway.

I have to confess that my reaction to it was controlled distaste. I ended up voting for the guy, but it was in spite of rather than because of that slogan. But American men, and especially guys who are in their late 20s, aren't really comfortable with concepts like kindness and gentleness. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to remind you of a scene from *The Little Rascals* (Universal City Studios, 1994). The scene cuts back and forth between a group of little girls and a group of little boys. They are each complaining about the things that are different from themselves. Right at the very beginning of that comparison, Darla points out that “girls get along with other.” And Spanky answers that “boys stand up for themselves.” Darla says, “girls share”; and Spanky answers, “boys take what's theirs.” Obviously, these are over-generalizations, but the truth is I'm naturally drawn toward “standing up for myself and claiming what I think is mine.”

So, what do I do with kindness and gentleness?

Is KINDNESS really practical?

We're going to devote an entire study to gentleness in a couple of weeks. So let's take a hard look for the rest of the morning at KINDNESS. Of course, most of us learned about the importance of kindness beginning in the cradle. But when I think about what makes the world go around, and what it is that the culture we live in really honors, I have to admit that it seems like the aggressive and the ambitious seem to make out best. In other words, “Nice guys finish last.” It's the nice guy who thinks about others before he thinks about himself. It's the nice guy who goes out of his way and even takes money out of his own pocket to help someone else. And in the end, what does it get him?

Isn't that the question George Bailey wrestled silently with throughout most of his life in *It's A Wonderful Life*? Time after time, he put the interests of others ahead of what he wanted. And it all came to a climax on that Christmas eve night when \$8,000 turned up missing, and he sat asking for help from Mr. Potter, the meanest, most miserly man in town. Face to face, the two sat and we saw the contrast – the man who had practiced kindness all his life sat on the brink of financial catastrophe asking for help from the man who had driven hard over everybody else in the way and had more money than he would ever be able to spend in his entire life.

Which one would the world call a success? But in the end, it was George Bailey who was called the richest man in town, as all his friends flooded through his door to contribute to his need.

But that's just the movies...is it true in real life?

According to the Bible, it is.

Acts 9:36-40 (NLT¹)

³⁶There was a believer in Joppa named Tabitha (which in Greek is Dorcas). She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor. ³⁷About this time she became ill and died. Her friends prepared her for burial and laid her in an upstairs room. ³⁸But they had heard that Peter was nearby at Lydda, so they sent two men to beg him, "Please come as soon as possible!"

³⁹So Peter returned with them; and as soon as he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other garments Dorcas had made for them. ⁴⁰But Peter asked them all to leave the room; then he knelt and prayed. Turning to the body he said, "Get up, Tabitha." And she opened her eyes! When she saw Peter, she sat up!

The lesson I get from this is that Kindness makes us VALUABLE to others. Something about this woman Dorcas was so beneficial and precious to these people that Peter called her back from the grave so that her influence could continue. Evidently, kindness is practical, even more profitable, than the path of ambition and aggression. That fact might not be obvious until some type of crisis comes.

Has KINDNESS been valuable to me?

Maybe one of the best ways to encourage our ability to believe that kindness is profitable would be to pause for a moment to think about how we have benefited from it. A few years back, I had a conversation with a man who had grown up in a series of foster homes until the age of about thirteen, when he was finally adopted. The brutality of those early years of his life was almost unimaginable. The one story that stands out in my mind the most was the so-called "foster parents" tied him to the plumbing in the basement overnight. When he was finally adopted in his early teens, the couple showered him with kindness and love. The way they treated him was 180 degrees opposite from the way he had been treated throughout his life to that point. You can only imagine the depth of devotion he felt toward them.

Let's think for a moment about the kindness we have received from God, a kindness that is 180 degrees opposite from the way we are treated in the world around us.

Romans 11:22 (CEV²)

²²Now you see both how kind and how hard God can be. He was hard on those who fell, but he was kind to you. And he will keep on being kind to you, if you keep on trusting in his kindness. Otherwise, you will be cut away too.

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The author of these words is talking about justice and the mercy of God. Throughout generations, He had patiently nurtured a relationship with a nation called Israel. He chose them to be, in the words of **Exodus 19:5**, His “*special treasure from among all the nations of the earth.*” But a great many of the people of Israelite heritage were not faithful to God. So **Romans 11** talks about how God has cut them away and grafted in we Gentiles who choose to trust Him.

By the way, this scripture dispels that myth that can often trap young men into thinking that kindness is somehow a sign of weakness. After all, they don’t call God “The Almighty” for nothing! We read here that God has both the power and the willingness to execute justice on people who refuse to submit to His ways. That may sound like “might makes right,” except that His ways always result in what is best for us. Everything God does, even the judgment He delivers, is for the good of His creation and for the good of His people. It’s not something He had to do...it’s not something any of us deserved or earned, especially since we can all name several ways we have ignored God in our lives...but God shows His kindness to us by making sure “rebellion” does not have to be the last verdict in our lives. And forever we will be trophies of His kindness.

Ephesians 2:7 (NLT)

⁷And so God can always point to us as examples of the incredible wealth of his favor and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us through Christ Jesus.

One important fact about this, though, is that God’s kindness carries a responsibility to everyone who benefits from it.

1 Peter 2:2 (NLT)

¹ So get rid of all malicious behavior and deceit. Don't just pretend to be good! Be done with hypocrisy and jealousy and backstabbing. ²You must crave pure spiritual milk so that you can grow into the fullness of your salvation. Cry out for this nourishment as a baby cries for milk, ³now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

The Fantastic Four is a movie that tells the story of a group of five people who physically altered by exposure to a certain type of radiation. Each of them begins to exhibit some type of supernatural ability. At a critical point in the movie, each has to wrestle with the question of why they were given these powers and how should they use them. Four of them decide that they have a responsibility to use their abilities for good.

Today, I want us to all realize that God has exposed us to supernatural kindness so that we will express supernatural kindness into this world.

How can I express KINDNESS more consistently in my life?

1. Kindness results naturally from KNOWING GOD – this is the obvious starting point. If my goal was to squirt everybody I meet with water, I better stay pretty close to a faucet, right. So if my goal is to express kindness to everybody I meet, I better stay pretty close to the source of kindness.

Zechariah 7:9 (NLT)

⁹"This is what the LORD Almighty says: Judge fairly and honestly, and show mercy and kindness to one another.

God requires and expects us to be kind.

2. Kindness requires INVESTMENT – we have to be willing to pay the price. Let me illustrate this in a story from the Old Testament.

2 Samuel 9:1 (NLT)

¹One day David began wondering if anyone in Saul's family was still alive, for he had promised Jonathan that he would show kindness to them.

Let's connect the dots here, just so that everyone is on the same page. Saul was the first king of Israel. His son, Jonathan, was in line to become the second king of Israel until Saul displeased God by his pattern of pride. So God chose David to be the second king of Israel; and in the last years of his life, Saul did everything he could to get rid of him. But David and Jonathan developed one of the deepest friendships that the world has ever known. David, on his part, never did anything to usurp the throne and treated Saul with the utmost respect. And Jonathan was completely submitted to God's wisdom and will, and was never jealous of the opportunity his friend was going to have. Their friendship was so strong that they promised to look out for each other's family.

So in **2 Samuel 9**, David is king. Saul and Jonathan have by now been killed in wars. And David wants to keep his promise. Nobody would have faulted him if he didn't...I'm not sure exactly how many people knew of the promise he made; besides, as far as everybody knew, all of Saul's and Jonathan's families were dead. But David wasn't satisfied. So he went on an active search for someone to show kindness to. In the end, they found a man who was the crippled son of Jonathan, and David took care of him for life.

Let's use that story to start a list of four action items that will help you practice more kindness in your life...

- a. Look in

David looked into his heart and nurtured the desire to keep his promise. It is essential for us to look into our hearts and nurture the desire to practice kindness. We would probably be wise to take some time every morning to think about the people we are going to meet and plan ways to be kind to them. David had to look past all the ways Saul had betrayed him. Maybe we have to look past all the ways we have been disappointed and disillusioned by others. David also had to look at his heart to protect it from becoming proud, and keep from thinking that he was superior to Jonathan's son. **Galatians 6:1** warns us about our attitudes when we help others by saying, "*be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.*"

- b. Listen up

It seems like I am reminding you about how important it is to listen about every other week. But it's true...to a great extent, our ability to serve God and serve the people in our lives depends on being aware of their needs, and listening is essential. And you have to listen with expertise, because a lot of the time all you get is hints. A good business man knows how to do that. Steve Genova knows that whenever a person is talking about problems with a car, that's when you ask if it's time to replace it. Matt Brunk knows that whenever a person talks about buying a car, that's a good time to ask if he is satisfied with his insurance. So listen for hints that will help you know the kindness you can practice in the life of the person you are talking to.

c. Lead on

I know you will face times when you will be tempted to think, “Why should I be kind to *that* person? He hasn’t ever done anything for me. When he does, then I’ll do something nice for him.” That’s a natural attitude. But God’s design is for us to exhibit *supernatural* kindness. We need to have an attitude that sets us apart and is noticeably different from the rest of society around us. More than once, Jesus asked his followers, “What do you more than others?”³ Well, being the first to practice kindness is certainly more than most people are willing to do.

d. Lay out

This action item talks about how far we have to be willing to go. You’ve probably seen an overhead shot of a baseball field with the nine players standing in their positions. I am always awed by how big the field looks and how small the players look. It seems like it ought to be pretty easy to get the ball between the players. They have to cover so much ground. And the great ones find a way. An outfielder will sprint as hard as he can for thirty years and then dive...it’s called “laying out”...stretched out and flying through the air in his attempt to reach the ball in time. That’s the effort I want to give when it comes to practicing kindness.

Are you willing? Anything less runs a dangerous risk in your relationship with God.

Romans 2:4 (NIV⁴)

⁴Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

If you have experienced the kindness of God, you have to understand that He intends for that kindness to result in a transformation. I know that can be hard. It’s so hard that you can’t do it without His help. Right now, you may be struggling as you think about a person in your life that you should be more kind to. Good for you! That means you are sensing God’s influence in your heart. Now, surrender to Him. Maybe you even need to step forward while we’re singing our commitment song. Admit that you can’t do this without His help. Let us pray together. It may take time, but if you consistently talk to Him about the situation, He will work in you.

And God’s kindness is always big enough to wrap its arms around one more person. Right now, I’m talking to the people who have never consciously invited Jesus to be their Savior. If you’ve never done that, then you have never experienced His forgiveness. If you’ve never done that, then you cannot look forward to eternal life in His presence. God loves you so much, and He wants to have an intimate relationship with you. I can tell you how that can be started. The Bible says that when we believe in Him, confess that we are sinners that need Him in our lives, pledge to let Him lead us into a different way of living and are buried with Him in baptism, we become new creatures! If you have never done that before, perhaps today is the day you are ready. I invite you to come forward and we will help you start that new life.

³ A thought expressed in “Miss Manners and Mr. Goodwrench – Ephesians 4:25-5:2,” *HomileticsOnline.com*, 8/11/1991.

⁴ Scripture marked NIV taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.