

Be Kind to One Another
Ephesians 4:32

This past week our news was filled with devastating acts of violence. We don't know all the details although the media is swift to speculate and pass judgement on the two men who were shot early in the week. Then on Thursday night in Dallas a rally ended in chaos as 11 police officers were shot.

Racial tensions once again are enflamed.

The fear of terrorist activity spreads.

The LGBT community presses for more tolerance.

Bumper stickers promote coexistence among the world's religions and people groups.

How is the Christian supposed to respond in a mad, mad, mad, mad world? While other religions call for different ways to respond in a crazy world, Christianity offers a solution like none other. It's the one another command we consider today, but let's be clear about one thing. It's only possible through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I invite you to stand as we read together.

Ephesians 4:29-32

The daily life principle is found in verse 32 where we are commanded to be kind to one another. We will consider these four points.

Kindness – the disposition of God

Kindness – the demonstration of Christ

Kindness – the development of the Spirit

Kindness – the deed of the believer

Before we consider these points let's discuss what we mean by kindness. We may have a general understanding of what it is to be kind, but let's also see how the Bible uses and defines the term.

Strong's Concordance defines being "kind" by describing what it is not. It is the opposite of "harsh, hard, sharp and bitter" and is synonymous with being gracious, pleasant and good.

When we review the list of character traits that we are to get rid of, they are the antithesis of kindness. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." (vs. 29-31)

Let's face it folks, kindness and these other traits just don't mix. They're like oil and water, hot sauce and ice cream, me and coffee. If we are to be kind we cannot be practicing those traits listed.

Wycliffe's Bible Encyclopedia says that kindness in the Old Testament is used of both man and God. When used of man it may mean kindness in the sense of doing favors in fulfillment of a pact or of covenant obligations as when David after he became king showed kindness to Jonathan's son Mephibosheth in keeping the covenant he and Jonathan had made.

It can also mean mercy or pity extended to someone who is in need as we see in Job 6:14 which says "To him that is afflicted, pity should be shown from his friends..." Ruth showed kindness to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Or take Mordecai took in Esther after she was orphaned.

In the New Testament the same Greek word can be translated upright in the sense of good character or it can be used of someone who is generous.

Jewish historian Josephus used the word in the sense of being morally good and called David someone who was considerate and friendly.

Originally kindness meant adapted to its purpose and later came to mean what was useful or helpful, benevolent and gracious. From it we come to understand that it is some kind of gracious act on

the part of one person toward another and includes compassion and an inner motivation of affection.

In the early '80's someone coined the phrase "random acts of violence and senseless acts of cruelty." Sitting in a restaurant in 1982, Anne Herbert mulled that slogan over in her mind and scribbled an idea on a placemat. What if that were somehow turned around? And so began a movement that has become a national crusade to promote "random acts kindness and selfless acts of beauty". One week each year people are encouraged to practice some random kindness.

But what motivates someone to demonstrate kindness? Is it for self-gratification, the easing of an otherwise guilty conscience, the simple satisfaction that you have in some way helped another human being? Or is it perhaps motivated with the hopes that you will earn merit with God?

For the Christian there is an entirely different motivation than that of the world for showing kindness. When we become a new creation, that character trait is being developed in us, but before we get to that we need to understand where it originates. We must consider first that kindness is a disposition of God.

I. KINDNESS IS THE DISPOSTION OF GOD

We begin by looking at kindness as an attribute of God.

A. Kindness Is His Attribute

Nehemiah 9:13-17

In this passage we see a confession of the Levites acknowledging that their current plight was as a result of their forefathers' negligence in keeping God's commandments resulting in their exile. Under the leadership of Nehemiah a number of Jews returned from Babylon to rebuild the wall of

Jerusalem. As they praised God there was also a time of repentance and in their prayer they confess that God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger (patient), and of great kindness (KJV). The NIV says God abounds in love. Either translation is right because kindness is love in action. It's just my opinion, but I don't think a person can show kindness if he first of all doesn't love. And that's the thing about God. Because He is love, He is also kind. This character trait of God isn't just something He does, kindness is who He is. Kindness isn't something He developed along the way working with an obstinate people, but an attribute He always had.

Here's the thing about kindness and if you get one thing out of today's message let it be this – *Kindness notices and then acts. The eye of kindness motivated by love for others sees a need and the hands and feet of kindness then act.*

God saw their plight, remembered His covenant with them and then acted in kindness toward them to bring them back to the land of promise.

There is another similar term in the Old Testament that is used some 240 times. We especially see it used in the book of Psalms. It's a word that describes God and His acts toward people, people who don't deserve anything. It's how He has acted toward us. It's the word lovingkindness. In the Greek writing of the Old Testament the word is often used in connection with the word mercy. In Psalm 136 each verse reminds us that God's loving-kindness lasts forever.

Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament indicates that lovingkindness implies personal involvement and commitment in a relationship beyond the rule of law.

For example, the law stated that if you had a field being harvested, you were to leave the corners and not pick up any stalks of grain that had fallen in

order for the poor to come along and glean what remained. Boaz went beyond the law and showed lovingkindness to Ruth by giving her more than she had gleaned in the day. God in His lovingkindness goes beyond and gives us more.

Kindness is an attribute of God. The Old Testament also shows us that kindness is an activity of God, which makes sense. If that is who you are, it is also what you do.

B. Kindness Is His Activity

We go into a store and we see a calculator on display. We know by sight that it's a calculator. That's what it is, which means we also know what it does. When we punch in mathematical equations we expect it to do what it is supposed to do because that is what it is. When I punch in 2+2 I will get a mathematical answer of 4 not a recipe for peanut butter cookies or directions to the zoo.

When we read in Galatians 5:22 that kindness is a fruit of the Spirit, we understand that it is something which comes from God because it is who God is. God is not going to give us something that He does not possess. We could just as easily say that God is kindness as we do that God is love. Kindness is His attribute. Kindness is also His activity. It is who He is and it is what He does.

The kindness of God was shown to Adam and Eve who deserved instant physical death for their disobedience, but God spared them.

The kindness of God was shown to Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, when he traveled to find a wife for Isaac.

Genesis 24:12 "And he said, 'O Lord God of my master, Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.'"

The kindness of God was shown to Lot in sparing him from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

David spoke of God's kindness: "Blessed be the Lord; for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a besieged city." Psalm 31:21

God's kindness was shown to Israel when He said to them: "In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you," says the Lord, your Redeemer. For the mountains will depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness will not depart from you, neither will the covenant of My peace be removed," says the Lord, who has mercy on you." Isaiah 54:8, 10

Some people read the Old Testament and consider God to be a vengeful, merciless God. But a careful reading of it reveals something entirely different about God. He demonstrates lovingkindness toward His people.

Fast forward to our day and be reminded once again and encouraged that God's attribute of kindness is just as evident as it has always been. Scripture tells us that He is the Lord and He does not change. That tells me His kindness will not change either. I see in verses like II Peter 3:9 His unchanging, unlimited lovingkindness. "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Coupled with His patience is the thread of kindness.

We also see it in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." The expression of His love is shown in kindness to offer those who believe in Christ the joy of eternal life. Romans 4:2 is very clear stating that God's kindness leads to repentance.

Have you experienced the kindness of God? Can you think of ways God has shown you kindness? God has saved us through His kindness. God has given us this day. God has provided for daily needs.

His kindness is seen in the act of one God follower toward someone else.

Will you pause and give thanks today for His kindness toward you?

Kindness is God's disposition.

II. KINDNESS IS THE DEMONSTRATION OF CHRIST

Think first of His audience.

A. His Audience

Mark 10:45 reminds us that Jesus came to serve others rather than to be served. It was His intention to demonstrate for them that service is a required activity for the person who would show kindness.

As we read the Gospels about Jesus' ministry on earth we can't help but notice that kindness was shown to those who were the marginalized, the outcasts, the downtrodden. They were the dregs of society, those considered as a scourge on the land. He showed kindness to lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, the demon possessed, Gentiles and Samaritans.

There was Malchus, servant of the chief priest.

We can't forget Peter or Zacchaeus.

The thief on the cross, the woman caught in the act of adultery, the prostitute who bathed His feet with tears and perfumes, and the woman at the well.

There was the demon possessed man in Gadara and the woman at the well.

5,000 hungry men received His kindness.

People were the target of His kindness.

Who are you targeting? What did He do for them?

B. His Assistance

He demonstrated kindness to Malchus after his ear was lopped off by Peter.

He demonstrated kindness to Peter after he denied Christ.

He demonstrated kindness to the thief hanging on the cross alongside Him.

He demonstrated kindness to a conniving, deceitful thief sitting in a Sycamore tree.

He demonstrated kindness to the lame, the blind, and the deaf.

He showed kindness to common people.

He showed kindness to the 5,000 by feeding them.

He demonstrated kindness to us when He hung on the cross and shed His blood, taking our sin and our punishment.

From the masterful pen of composer John W. Peterson in his Easter Cantata *No Greater Love* comes this song depicting the essence of Jesus' ministry years.

When our Lord was here, Our Savior dear,
He gladdened each neighborhood;
For the Bible tells, The message spells,
"He went about doing good."

Chorus

He went about doing good,
And helping where'er He could;
Our example is He,
And like Him we should be,
Who went about doing good.

It was love revealed When the lame He healed,
The blinded one made to see;
When He raised the dead, The hung'ring fed,
The demon possessed set free.

Where ever there was a need He stepped in and demonstrated kindness showing the religious elite that no one should be beyond the reach of kindness. People were His audience, their needs received His assistance.

We all have needs of various kinds that He helps us with, but the greatest need is demonstrated by the greatest act of kindness – while we were still sinners, He died for us.

Kindness is the disposition of God.

Kindness is demonstrated in Christ.

Kindness is the development of the Spirit.

III. KINDNESS IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPIRIT

The obvious place to turn is Galatians 5:22-23 where we see kindness as part of His fruit.

A. His Fruit

Among the nine elements of fruit being developed in us is kindness. This is unconditional kindness, a kindness that is not natural to us. Fruit is something that the Spirit continues to develop in the believer as he yields himself more and more to the guiding control of the Spirit. The evidence of a person's salvation should be seen in the development of this fruit in the person's life. If this fruit is not evident in a person's life even in a very faint way, salvation can be questioned. On the other hand just because a person may display these character traits does not mean they are saved. Jesus said in Matthew 7:16-18 that you will know them by their fruits.

The more receptive a person is to the working of the Holy Spirit in one's life, the more evident will be the fruit and Jesus desires that we bear much fruit (John 15:8)

John MacArthur writes: "The Spirit's provision of fruit might be compared to a man standing on a ladder in an orchard, picking the fruit and dropping it into a basket held by a helper below. No matter how much fruit is picked and dropped, the helper will not receive any unless he is standing under the ladder with his basket ready."

The fruit of kindness that the Holy Spirit is developing in the believer is a tender concern for others. It has a genuine desire to treat others gently. We see this in the words of Jesus who encouraged us to come and receive rest from Him because He was gentle. (Matthew 11:28-29)

It is His fruit being developed in us.

B. His Faithfulness

The lack of development of this fruit in us is not

because of His inability, but because of our unwillingness to yield more of ourselves to His control. It is a daily, conscious decision.

Someone I knew went swimming in the ocean one time and got caught in the under tow. Not familiar with how strong it was she struggled to stay on top of the water but was having difficulty. At one point in the struggle she gave up assuming that she was not going to make it, but when she yielded herself to the power of the undertow, it put her up on shore.

Our struggle with the Holy Spirit can impede His work in us. Only when we give in to His power will we see His fruit grow in us.

He will faithfully continue His work to develop the fruit of kindness in us. If we ever wonder why we have a lack of kindness we need look no further than our own heart. *It is my belief that self-centeredness is at the heart of our indifference.*

Only by yielding to the Holy Spirit can we begin to see development of the fruit of kindness as He faithfully produces more of this character in us.

So where does that leave us? How do we respond?

IV. KINDNESS IS THE DEED OF THE BELIEVER

A. His Endeavor

I Corinthians 13:1-4a

Kindness is not only the product of the Spirit, it is the product of love, unconditional love, love that sees and then acts.

Some anonymous person wrote "The greatest feats of love are performed by those who have had much practice in performing daily acts of kindness."

Writer and theologian Frederick Buechner stated "If

you want to be holy, be kind.”

C.S. Lewis wrote “The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he ‘likes’ them; the Christian, trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on – including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.”

That is the fruit of the Spirit being developed in you.

Someone else wrote that “Kindness is the one thing you will never have to take back.”

Kindness on our part to others is a command, it’s written that way in our verse “Be kind to one another...”

The point C.S. Lewis made is clear, it’s all too easy to be kind to someone who will be kind to us in return or to be kind to those people we like. We need to take a page out of Jesus’s life and be kind to our enemies.

In Matthew 10:42 Jesus says “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”

From the Wisdom of Solomon we read “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.” (Proverbs 25:21-22)

True kindness is measured in those acts demonstrated toward those who will never be able to reciprocate or who consider us an enemy. This week the Ark Encounter opened in KY. A group of atheists were going to picket the opening. Ken Ham planned on passing out water to them in an act of kindness to them.

Someone else said “Inward godliness is always manifested by outward kindness.”

We are living in a broken world, a world that claws and fights for the top rung leaving others as victims strewn along the road of life. We, the church, must wake up from Rip Van Winkle’s long slumber and display kindness to a world that is hurting, reeling from its brokenness, wounded by the uncaring acts of others. Let’s once again learn to serve rather than feeling like we should be the ones being served. We need kind hearts. We are called to be a people of kindness.

In his book *Everybody’s Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, John Ortberg writes “The more spiritually mature you grow, the more you will find your heart being drawn to people. You want to reach out to people, especially those neglected by society or are far from God.”

Every one of us can think of some tangible way this week where we can demonstrate kindness at home, at work, in the church, to our neighbors, in our city with a kind word or a kind act.

A letter, phone call, or visit

A ride to an appointment

Giving food to a needy family

Mowing a neighbor’s lawn

Offering to babysit

One of the great New Testament lessons about kindness is when four friends went to the home of a friend, paralyzed, unable to do anything for himself they carried him to see Jesus. They were undaunted in the quest when a large crowd impeded their way to the Master. With thinking caps on, they took their friend up to the top of the house and chopped a hole in the roof lowering him down.

The question for us to ponder is this: Are we willing to carry someone else’s mat? That’s real kindness.

That guy could have told his friends he didn’t want to be a bother or for them not to go to any trouble. But they weren’t going to allow him to rob them of a blessing.

This past week Dad told us of a time we were visiting our home church. A man came up and put some money in his hand. Dad didn't want to take it because he knew the man didn't have much money himself. The man responded by telling Dad he wasn't going to be robbed of a blessing, so Dad graciously took the gift as an act of kindness.

If someone wants to demonstrate kindness to you, don't rob them of a blessing by refusing their act of kindness. Accept it as God's gift.

Kindness is love with its work clothes on. It is not done merely as a humanitarian gesture, otherwise we are no different than any other random act of kindness. Our motivation should be twofold.

The first is to demonstrate the fruit of God's Spirit growing in us.

The second is to deliver a message to those who see or who receive our act of kindness.

Not only is kindness the believer's endeavor it is a means of his evangelism.

B. His Evangelism

We read in Matthew 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Our acts of kindness should point to Christ. Out of kindness when we carry someone's groceries or mow their lawn or take them to an appointment let them know we are doing it because we love God.

Jesus said if we show kindness to others to be seen by men we will have our reward, but if we do them that God might be glorified and others can see His love through you, then He is glorified and someone may come to know Christ through it.

In the book *The Conspiracy of Kindness* the author says "For most Christians, doing evangelism is a lot like going to the dentist; no one really enjoys doing it, but it must be done once in a while. But anyone

can do simple acts of kindness...People don't necessarily remember what they are told of God's love, but they never forget what they have experienced of God's love."

The next time you go watch your grandkids play soccer take a cooler full of water and pass it out and tell them you're doing it because you love Jesus.

If you want a little more anonymity take a spray bottle and roll of paper towel to parking lot and wash windshields and then put a little card in the window saying you washed their windshield for Jesus so they could see clearly.

Kindness can be shown in so many ways.

You may recognize today that you have been going through life with blinders and ear muffs on not seeing or hearing the needs around you. Can you with the help of God's Spirit remove them so that He can develop the fruit of kindness? God uses our endeavors to encourage the believer and evangelize the non-believer.

John Wesley put this admonition into a simple rule:

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.

I have some work to do. How about you? Let's go out and be kind to one another.