

# Kindness

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So our theme for this evening is kindness. It's incredibly attractive characteristic, kindness. I think we all agree with that.

Fused with the others in the fruit of the Spirit, you're tasting, beginning to taste perfection. I think when it's missing in our lives and our experiences, we long for it and we long for a better world. And when we do experience it in our lives, it's a little bit of a taste of the world ahead, the world we look forward to, and we want more of it. I hope you'll be challenged by that. I was tremendously convicted by in preparation for this. I kind of came into it thinking, kindness. What new can be said about kindness or everyone knows about kindness, but I have to say I was deeply convicted by my own lack of kindness by God's Spirit as I was preparing for this. And I hope that will be the case to a lesser degree with you, but nonetheless that it will be, not because I don't want the Spirit to convict, but because you don't sense and you aren't lacking in kindness as I am.

My premise this evening is very much that kindness is one of the most powerful apologetics for the gospel today. Many things that can speak powerfully of Jesus Christ, but I think kindness in the world in which we live is one of the most powerful apologetics. It's a sign of great spiritual strength, not softness or weakness. It is intentional grace. It's grace in action. It's love in action.

Kindness is a really significant characteristic fruit of the Spirit. So I want to keep to the same structure that we've been looking at throughout our series on the fruit of the Spirit. What is it?

What is its opposite? What's its counterfeit? And how do we get it in our lives? And we need to recognize that the fruit of the Spirit and the characteristics are not simply natural to us. So the word *Christos*, the word for kindness means useful or good or pleasant, tender concern, kindness of heart and act. It's very much our benevolence to other people, how we treat other people. It's more than, you know, we can talk about having a kind attitude, and a kind attitude is very important, but it's much more than that. It's the actions of someone who's being transformed and is being transformed by grace. Okay, one John 3 says, not with words or tongue, love not just with words and or tongue, although I will say a little bit about words and tongue as well, but with actions and in truth. So it's this recognition of taking God, God's grace and acting on it in a way that is kind. Okay, so it's a God characteristic. It's not simply a natural character, it's a God characteristic. Titus 3 speaks about the, we sung about the kindness of God in both of these Psalms, and the second psalmist wasn't interesting. He cried out to God in despair and in darkness, where's your kindness gone? Will I ever experience it again? That the deficit of kindness spiritually was a huge problem to the psalmist. But it's a God characteristic, and

[ 3 : 5 7 ] Titus says, the kindness of God which appeared in salvation or in Romans 2, the riches of His kindness, His kindness leads to repentance, the riches of His grace and of His salvation leading us to turn towards God and to love Him. So it's linked very much with the idea of God's covenant commitment, God's determination to not let go of us, to be kind to us, and to show Himself to us. There's a great Old Testament word which sometimes we speak about, *chesed*, which is beautifully translated in the authorized version of the Bible as loving kindness, because there's not really an English equivalent.

It's loving kindness, that grace which shows itself in kindness, and it's action, the action of God stemming from His character, the character that God is love, and therefore God is kind. Okay, the two goes together. Now I wonder, in our thinking of God, if we actually think that of God, often do we think of Him as a kind God? It's often accused of being not a kind God, and yet at the very core of His character God is love, therefore God is also kind. We didn't read it, we read a couple of different passages, but I was tempted to read another passage from Ezekiel chapter 16. We're not going to read that today, but if you do have time, go home and read it. It's one of the great passages of the Old Testament where God gives a story to explain His kindness and His covenant kindness to His people, and He does so with a great allegory, a great picture of Israel, and He speaks of them as a newborn child, and that's kind of been a little bit of our theme this weekend in our prayers and what we've been thinking about almost incidentally. Newborn child thrown out into the desert to die, post-birth abortion, as it were, thrown out to die, rejected, ignored, put in the desert just to slowly dehydrate and die. God comes along and sees this child just wallowing in its own blood, and says, live. He takes this young baby girl, and He takes her into his home, and He washes her, and He cleans her, and He feeds her, and He clothes her, and He adopts her, and He looks after her till she is old enough for love, and then He marries her and she becomes the queen, and then she prostitutes herself, but He still remembers her, and He still takes her back, and it's this great picture of kindness, of God's kindness to His people, an allegory of His kindness to His people, of His long-suffering, and of His, it really speaks of the very nature of kindness, which is towards those who need it most and who are most helpless, towards the enemy, towards the ones who can't and who in some cases won't repay, to those who are thankless. How often does the

Bible speak of God pouring out His kindness to those who are disinterested, pours out the sun and the rain to shine on all the righteous and the wicked. God is love, God is kind, and we recognize that often. It's this characteristic particularly of showing kindness where it is least deserved, and often where it is least sought. And there's again a couple of illustrations, the Old Testament believer David in the story we read. Is that not a story that brings, I felt quite emotional even as it was being read again this evening. It's a hugely powerful story of King David showing kindness to the last person in the world that should have received kindness from a king in the ancient Near East, the last surviving heir to the throne of King Saul, the grandson of King Saul, Jonathan, his great friend's son who was crippled, who was a dead dog in his own words. And David said, you'll eat with me, you'll eat at the king's table all the days of your life. Zeba will be your servant and all his family will serve you and they will provide for you all the days of your life. It would have been perfectly legitimate for David to have slain with Phobyshed as a threat to his kingdom and as a threat to his kingship. But he takes him in and shows him great kindness, and he was crippled in both his feet. That's the end of the chapter. And it's this act of kindness to one who wouldn't be able to repay, who was unworthy and who didn't at a human level deserve that kindness. And of course in the New Testament there are many examples, but Jesus himself is the great example of kindness. God is love, Jesus is love, Jesus is kind. And we look through the gospel, it's not a soft thing, is it? It's not a weak thing, it's not a sappy thing, it's a strong kindness that he shows a tender concern for others. So often Jesus is God's visual for us, he is God's movie for us, it's where we see God. And we see so often his kindness, his kindness to disciples who didn't understand, who kept getting things wrong, who rejected him, who'd betrayed him and who denied him. His kindness to the Samaritan women, kindness to the leper, kindness to a boy who was having seizures, kindness to Jairus, daughter, kindness to people, people who couldn't help themselves, people who were at a last resort calling out to him, people who sometimes weren't even calling out to him, but nonetheless he showed them great kindness. So there's one example I want to take, it's maybe not one of the most common examples of his kindness. But it was the moment, just about his greatest darkness in Gethsemane where he had been sweating drops of blood, the pressure and the intensity, bringing around himatid rossus and the bursting of his capillaries, mixing with the sweat of the oppression of the moment and all the darkness of his betrayal.

He rises to meet his oppressors, rises to meet his enemies, and they come at him and there's a stench of opposition in the darkness, and his disciples are kind of not understanding what's going on, and he says, if you come at me with swords, I've been in your company all week, why have you come at me in the dead of night with torches and swords? And in that moment of kind of false bravado, Peter takes out his sword and cuts off the servant, the high priest, Jair Malchus.

And there's that great act of kindness, isn't there? In that moment of oppression, of heaviness, of opposition, shortly of arrest, he just touches Malchus here and heals him. Undeserved kindness.

[ 11 : 50 ] I wonder what effect it had on that individual. We don't know anything more about him. But what a great act of unsolicited kindness Jesus shows to Malchus, the servant, in that healing.

And kindness, its reflection does remain in our world, even when God is left out, isn't it? We do see many acts of kindness and many kind-hearted people, I think for us, even without God, it's sometimes some of the best things in life's experiences are acts of kindness or kind attitudes of others. There's a website called Random Acts of Kindness. And people are encouraged to do kind things graciously for no reason, you know, share a positive news story, send someone a real letter, read a book to a child, pick up litter, pay it forward with coffee. There's a world kindness day.

People see and recognize that kindness is a beautiful thing. And the paradox is that it's in a society that can't explain where kindness would come from and why it's a beautiful thing without a sense of the origin of kindness. And yet the world is transformed by kindness, even at a human level. But for us here, the fruit of the Spirit is kindness. This is a spiritual characteristic, not simply a human one, and we'll see why. Like the other fruit of the Spirit, all of us as believers are to grow and nurture and share this characteristic. It's not saying that, oh, some in the congregation are kind and some are patient and we fuse together. There may be a degree of that, but we are all to seek after all the fruit of the Spirit because it is all an outworking of love. We learn to be kind because even our kindness, as we'll go on to see briefly, is disordered without God at the very heart of it. So the fruit of the Spirit of kindness is rooted in our relationship with God, that we have been recipients of His salvific kindness that He's redeemed us when we have not deserved that and when we constantly let Him down and can't bring anything into His presence as an offering to deserve His kindness. And we recognize and we see the significance of that in our lives.

Our trust in our relationship is within this Savior who has been nailed to a tree in order to redeem us and set us free. So it's rooted in understanding who we are and what He has done, what He is doing and what He will do in our lives. So it's so significant to recognize and know our own hearts, our own unworthiness as we were reminded this morning and yet the tremendous kindness and grace of God to us in salvation and beyond, in that we are here and God continues and will not let us go and will protect us and will persevere and we will come through and we will know heaven.

So it's rooted in God and therefore it looks like God. It's the fruit of looking like God. We are to be those who recognize who He is as we are rooted in Him. It's the fruit of being rooted in Him.

[ 15 : 42 ] And it's focused therefore, kindness I believe is focused, the fruit of the spirit of kindness is focused in the way we treat other people. So kindness is how we treat other people because of the grace that we have received. So it's very significant that as we examine ourselves in the light of Scripture we think about how God's grace impacts on us responding to other people. And there's two things I want to just say about that, actions and words. So in terms of how we act, the kindness of God helps to mellow our natural reactions. It's something sweet and pleasing the fruit of the spirit. The motive for us to act kindly is simply for the sake of acting kindly.

You see the significance of that? It's simply for the sake of it. We are not looking for anything in return. It's something new, a new disposition in our heart. It begins with our very closest relationships and in concentric circles works out to every relationship we have. And it shows itself particularly to those who are unworthy of our kindness as maybe we think they are.

They are shown to those who are against us. It's how love behaves, the love of God, it's loving kindness. It's a generosity of spirit towards others in willing self-sacrifice, even to the ungrateful, to those who can't reciprocate kindness. I'll say a little bit more about counterfeit kindness and say a little bit more about it in that context. It is the kind of giving of the cup of cold water, unremarkable, unspectacular, without trumpet call, the kindness of simply treating others with grace in our lives, especially when we don't want to and we don't think it's deserved.

Now I'm just going to use one quick example here and it's a little bit of a stereotypical example. But if you walk to work in Edinburgh any time, you'll probably pass two or three people sitting on the street begging and we may be passed them and say, well, they're there because it's their own fault. If I give them anything, money, they'll just drink it. They're probably just part of a big network and they live in a big posh house at the edge of the city and drive a Rolls Royce.

And we may have all kinds of reasons just for walking past them. We think we're not helping them by just bringing them a cup of coffee. They need to help themselves. We may have many different reasons and many of them may be legitimate at one level. But kindness is simply giving them something warm on a cold day when they're sitting and knowing that they're despised, knowing that they sense a guilt and a rejection and that our walking past them and ignoring them are not catching their eye. We'll simply make things or confirm things to them.

[ 19 : 32 ] All we're asked to do is give charity, to give love, to be kind just for the sake of it. We don't want to change the world. We're not saying that they will be saved and redeemed, that our amazing act will be revolutionary. But when 150 people walk past them despising them, maybe one kind word will make a difference. Maybe going into Greg's and buying them a hot coffee and bringing it to them. And you know what? Asking their name is just something that is kind for the sake of it.

There's no reason beyond it. There's no master plan. It's simply being kind for the sake of being kind. Now that's a very stereotypical example. I'm sorry. I'm sure there's a million other ones.

Inaction, therefore, the fruit of the Spirit, inaction, and also probably just as significantly in words spoken and thought. So kindness is weighing up what we say. Thinking about how it'll affect the other person. Thinking the best of other people. Being kind even in our judgment of others, careful especially when we're speaking to them. It's very difficult when you're speaking about kindness as the fruit of the Spirit with regard to speaking and our thoughts, not to come in with the negative side. I'm not going to do that quite yet. I'll come to that. But if you're like me, this is the area that you will be shocked at how unkind your words and your thoughts can, particularly your thoughts can be, or how unkind they can be when you're outside of the company of the person you're being unkind to. So it's about kind words and kind thought. It's a massive area, the kindness of God and the fruit of the Spirit. Can I say that it changes the atmosphere in a room?

It diffuses tension. It makes a much more beautiful environment in which to live. It's a focus not on other people's behavior and on how they treat me, but on my heart changing, my influencing a situation for good, even when I'm wronged. It's a positive influence that may change a whole community and it is the fruit of the Spirit. So that is the fruit of the Spirit. What is its opposite? Well, can I just read briefly Ephesians 4, 29 to 32? Is that coming up on the screen?

So this is the opposite of kindness. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouth, but only such is as good for building up as it fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

[ 22 : 23 ] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender hearted for giving one another as God and Christ forgave you. So that's really the opposite, isn't it? The opposite of kindness spiritually is bitterness and they're kind of all fused in together. Anger, clamour and evil speaking, unkind.

Now, think of, as I think of my last week, you think of your last week. What bitterness may be in your heart that you're harboring? What mean-spiritedness? Potentially unkind actions, destructive talk of others, or destructive thoughts of others in the family, in the church, at your work. A lack of mercy, a self-righteous or judgmental attitude that's harsh. Quick to knock people down. I do it, and I hear it all the time. What are our conversations and our imaginations at home like? Are we as Christians in the workplace or in whatever environment we're in, are we any different to the world in which we live with respect to kindness? Do people express how kind you are as a person? Do people express of our church? What a kind place it is. Is that something that is intentional within our lives? That attitude of forgiveness and transformation. So the opposite is really what we read there, and it's very clear. What's the counterfeit of it very briefly? In other words, there's kindness that is the fruit of the Spirit, and there's also maybe another kindness that is identifiable but a counterfeit. I think that all therefore stems as with the others about our motive and about why we do these acts of kindness. And you can be kind and have a kind heart, as it were, in order to be seen by other people, for praise, to earn favor with them or with God, so that our motive is to be doing it in order to get something back. We can do a kind act with a really bad attitude, in that we're really doing it grump as a grump. You know, we don't really want to do it. It's a kind thing to do, but well, I can't really stand doing this, and I can't be bothered with the person who I'm doing it for. It can be selfish. It could be simply in a self-righteous way that we're being kind, or we can be kind only to those who we think, well, I'll be kind to them, because I'm pretty sure they'll be kind to me back, and they've got the resources to be kind back to me, and I may need them one day, or they deserve my kindness. I feel I ought to give them my kindness, because they deserve it. These are all, that's all counterfeit kindness. We're doing it with a motive either to get something in return, or because we've weighed and judged the person worthy of kindness, or in order to receive God's praise, or the praise of other people. It may even just be to make the world a better place. Now, that's a laudable reason, but it does lack the motive of doing it for the glory of God, and doing it because of God's mercy to me.

So there is a counterfeit kindness. And lastly, how do we get this kindness in our lives? As with the other fruit, it's a gift of the Spirit, and we know that the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree. That's a phrase we use, isn't it? She's like in a negative way. We use it here in a positive way. The fruit doesn't fall far from the tree. As we are rooted to Jesus Christ, as we are dependent on this, as we keep in step with the Spirit in our lives, then we will release the fruit of the Spirit by what we do. It'll become, in a sense, instinctive to us. It's this relational life we have with God, aware of our need for the outpouring of the Spirit, and aware also, as the New Testament speaks, of resisting or quenching or grieving the Holy Spirit by the opposite of kindness in our lives. So the question for us tonight is whether our roots, how do we root in our lives? And what relationship are we rooting it with? Is it a relationship with God where the fruit of the Spirit, as we are bedded in that place of refreshment by the stream, by this great tree that we were being fed to look like the Spirit, doesn't come if we remain separate and if we ignore that responsibility? It also comes, we get it through repentance, Romans 2 verse 4, or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? So we have that reality that, as I certainly experienced this week, that Christ is a mirror into our souls and there's sometimes a sharp awareness of our need to turn back to Him and seek forgiveness. The tension that we have in this life of falling short, but yet being forgiven and empowered to change and become more like Him. And we get it also with taking responsibility. Colossians 3, 12 says that we are to be those then who put on, clothe yourselves as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. So for most of us here, unless we are tremendously needy physically, most of us will clothe ourselves tomorrow morning. It's something we do. It's our responsibility. You get out of bed and it's intentional. You need to put your clothes on.

And here Paul is using that illustration spiritually. You must clothe yourselves with the grace of God. It's deliberate. It's intentional behavior in our lives. It's when we come to crossroads, when we can be mean and nasty or kind with our words or with our thoughts or with our actions, we do what the Holy Spirit commands us to do and what we are created to do in Christ, as Jeremy mentioned this morning. We continue to be students and learners seeking to be kind and seeking to display kindness in our lives. So my prayer, and I hope that you will take this prayer with you tomorrow into your life, and tonight as well. Lord, today help me to be kind.

You know, make an intentional reality of your life that you will have choices to be either bitter or harsh or kind, especially maybe with information that you've received about someone.

[ 30 : 00 ] I can take that and pass that particular juicy piece of dubiously true or not information and pass it on. Or I can think the worst of somebody, even though I don't know their hearts or lives.

Maybe that we hear that prayer resonating in our heads throughout the day. Lord, help me to be kind. Make me a kinder person. Make me a kinder person. And I think then when we come to the crossroads that we do every day, crossroads of choice, crossroads of what we say, crossroads of what we think, what we pass on, crossroads of who we show kindness to, that it will come back to us, that the Spirit will bring it to our attention as we pray for that. I do believe that is a significant prayer. Sam Cook wrote a very famous song about longing for his love of a young woman to be reciprocated. And if it was, he probably wouldn't know much about geography or history, but he did know a wonderful world this would be. And I think if we displayed kindness and realized the significance and importance of this characteristic of God is love, therefore God is kind, rooted in

His grace in our family, in our church, and then I think our world would become a wonderful place. Let's put our heads in prayer. Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us, that you would forgive us when we are not kind. We sometimes brush over this characteristic as if it were easy or soft or manageable. We do love kindness. We all love receiving kind acts and kind words.

We love giving them, but yet we find this battle within us to be unkind, to be ungracious, to be bitter, to be harsh, to be self-righteous. And Lord, we ask that you would help us to recognize as we look at Jesus' life, as we look at David with my phibosheth, as we consider the amazing story of the newborn baby girl thrown out into the desert to die, that we would understand the kind of God that we have and the kind of God that leaves us to breathe today, to live, to love, to be redeemed, to be forgiven, to be cleansed, to be adopted, to be those with a future, to be sought in light.

And we do pray and ask that you would help us to be kind and kind-hearted. And as we look at Scripture that we would find that mirror, yes, often convicting us, but as the light shines in the darkness, also cleansing and renewing and redeeming and making us whole and making us as beautiful as you have intended us to be. Lord, help us then we pray to be kind people, particularly in this harsh world in which we live, harsh world of media, opposition and harshness and just simply unkindness. Help us to reflect a different community, a different attitude, a different heart, and enable us to recognize as a miracle of being in Christ and that nourishing tree where we will bear His fruit. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.