

Sermon 1-31-21 — The Fruit of the Spirit — Kindness  
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Thus far, we have examined the first four fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, and patience (which the NIV translates as forbearance). We are half way through the fruits. What is the fruit of the Spirit? Paul tells us that, “**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**” — Galatians 5:22. This week we will look at the fifth fruit, kindness.

The Greek word that the NIV translates kindness is “**καλοσύνη**” ( Kray-so-tace) It can mean goodness, benevolence or kindness. When I think of kindness the first thing that comes to mind are the **Boys Life magazines** I used to read as a kid. They always featured a special Scouting section in which they highlighted a few heroes who had gone above and beyond in performing good deeds. These were kids who sacrificed to help neighbors in need or risked their own lives to save another. They were Boy Scouts doing what they were known for — “good deeds.” I used to dream of one day doing something heroic or at least something kind, like they had .

The deeds they did were kind, but for the most part they were not the sort of kindness that Paul was pointing to when he spoke of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul was not limiting kindness to heroic acts of sacrifice. Biblical kindness is not limited to saints who sacrifice their lives, give up their fortunes, or make headlines. Far more often, kindness is simple, ordinary, caring acts like holding a door, giving up our place in line, shoveling a neighbor’s walk, passing on a compliment, lending a listening ear, or doing the little things that too few take the time to do, that go unnoticed, but make a big difference.

Kindness begins with being aware of the feelings and needs of others. For example, a few years back, when I could actually visit in homes, I was visiting with an older man who wanted to show me something in a book he was reading. Remembering that he had left the book upstairs he asked his granddaughter to get the book for him. Delighted at the chance to be of help, she ran upstairs and returned with what was obviously the wrong book. You could tell that her grandfather was about to send her back for the right book when he noticed the look of pure joy on her face. Instead of correcting her, he gave her a big hug and thanked her for being such a good helper. Only after she had left did he quietly slip upstairs to get the right book himself. He showed me the passage but, to be honest, I don’t recall what it was about. However, I have not forgotten his simple act of kindness and how much it meant to his granddaughter.

An act of kindness does not have to be big or spectacular. Which is a good thing because it means that all of us can be kind. When I used to read Boy’s Life I dreamed of doing an heroic act of kindness that would land me in the **Scout’s in Action** section of the magazine. I dreamed of pushing a young child out of the way of a speeding car, of saving my family from drowning, of doing something that made the headlines. However, the kindness the Spirit calls us to is more often small acts that anyone can participate in. Not everyone can be featured in Boy’s Life, but anyone can be kind. Anyone. Even me.

That said, I don’t want to mislead you by making it sound like being kind is easy. Far from it. Many times the people who need our kindness the most are the ones that it is hardest to show kindness to. Who wants to show kindness to the sales person who calls in the middle of the night, to the person who is so needy that you fear they will attach themselves to you like a leech, to the person who wronged you or your family?

Being kind can be hard. I know that I have often failed to be kind. There are days when I am frustrated or have had too many needy calls or feel like I have been taken advantage of when my responses are anything but kind.

When I start to feel less than kind, when I question whether someone is deserving of my kindness, it helps me to recall Titus 3:3-8, **“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”**

Paul reminds Titus, and by extension us, that we are not better people than those folks we are hesitant to show kindness to. After all, we too were once fools, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to our lusts and pleasures, envious and hateful. We were not deserving of kindness, yet God kindly poured out grace upon us, showing mercy and making us heirs of Jesus Christ. God did not do this because we were good people, deserving of his kindness. God did it out of his own kindness.

That is key. God is kind. And God created us in his image to be kind, too. What does God expect in return for his kindness? God asks us to show that same kindness to others. God asks us to be kind, just as he is kind. But how can we do that? Like I said, being kind is not always easy, especially when it comes to being kind to those who need it the most and deserve it the least.

The good news is that God has promised to help us to be kind. You see, not only does God forgive us, God sends the Spirit to equip us and help us exhibit his kindness, even toward those we struggle with. Indeed, one sign that we have turned over our lives to the Spirit is that the Spirit nudges us and pushes us toward acts of kindness.

Nor does this spiritual transformation end with us. Amazingly, when we say “Yes” and begin to show kindness to others our kindness often begets kindness from them. Many times they, in turn, begin to show acts of kindness to others.

Let me illustrate. You recall the story of David. After he defeated Goliath, Saul invited him to join the king’s court. David did his best to serve his king, but over time Saul began to grow jealous of David and the way that the people came to love him. Time and again Saul sought to undermine David. Eventually, he decided that the only way to deal with this man, who he feared had become a rival, was to end his life. Saul might have succeeded, except his son, Johnathan, came to David’s rescue. Johnathan promised David that he would intercede with his father, and if he discovered that his father wanted David’s death he would bring him warning. This could not have been an easy promise for Johnathan to make or keep. Warning David would have been a betrayal of his father, the king. It might mean his own death. But Johnathan kept his word. He showed kindness to David, warning him and helping him to escape from his father.

Nor did Johnathan’s kindness return empty. For later, when David became king, he remembered the kindness Johnathan had shown him. He sought out Johnathan’s orphaned, crippled son and restored his family’s wealth to him and made him a guest of honor at his table. David returned Johnathan’s kindness by caring for his son.

Think of Rebekah. When Abraham sent a servant to find a suitable wife for his son, the servant chose Rebekah. Do you recall why he chose Rebekah? We are told that she was beautiful, but that was not why he chose her. Abraham’s servant chose Rebekah because she alone, of all the women who came to the well, offered to draw water, not just for Abraham’s servant but for his camels, as well. Camels drink a

lot. One commentator estimated that Rebekah may have drawn 300 gallons of water that day. Why did Abraham's servant chose Rebekah? Abraham's servant chose her to become the wife of Isaac because she was kind.

Kindness is like a seed. More often than not, when it falls to the ground it sprouts, springing up as even more kindness. A few months back I ordered a coffee at Starbucks. When I pulled up to the window to pay for my coffee the barista informed me that the car in front of me had already paid for it. I thought, "How kind of them." I felt so grateful that I offered to pay for the car behind me. When I offered to pay the barista broke into a huge smile. She explained that I was the 12th car in a row to pay for the car behind me and speculated on how long that chain of kindness might continue, one act of kindness leading to another act of kindness leading to another. You have heard the old saying, one bad apple can spoil the whole barrel. There is truth in that. Yet it works both ways. Much as one bad apple can spoil the whole barrel, one good apple can save it. We simply have no idea what difference an act of kindness will make if it falls on fertile soil.

The other day I read a story about a teacher who was struggling. She had been teaching for many years and had begun to question whether it was worth the effort, whether what she did made any difference. To make matters worse Teddy Stollard had been assigned to her class that year. Teddy was one of those sullen, unmotivated kids that is hard to like. The teacher kept telling herself that as a teacher she loved all of her students, but it wasn't exactly true. She rarely stopped by Teddy's desk to help him. She tried to avoid calling on him. She should have felt differently. She knew what his records said. They read:

**1st grade: Teddy shows promise with his work and attitude, but poor home situation.**

**2nd grade: Teddy could do better. Mother is seriously ill and he receives little help at home.**

**3rd grade: Teddy is a good boy, but he is a slow learner. His mother died earlier this year.**

**4th grade: Teddy is very slow, but well behaved. His father shows no interest.**

The teacher felt bad for Teddy, but it didn't make him any easier to like. Christmas came and many of her students brought presents. They piled them on her desk and crowded around to watch her open them. Much to her surprise there was even a present from Teddy Stollard. It was wrapped in brown paper, held together by a half roll of scotch tape. When she opened the gift out fell a gaudy, rhinestone bracelet with several stones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume. The other boys and girls giggled, but she had the good sense to silence them by putting on the bracelet and dabbing some perfume on her wrist.

At the end of the day, when school was dismissed, Teddy lingered behind. He slowly walked over to her desk and said, "Mrs. Thompson, you smell just like my mom and her bracelet looks real pretty on you. I'm sure glad you liked my present." When Teddy left Mrs. Thompson fell to her knees and asked God to forgive her, she asked the Holy Spirit to help her show kindness to all her students not just the ones who were easy to like.

The next day, when the kids arrived at school, they were welcomed by a new teacher. Mrs. Thompson was no longer just a teacher, she was an agent of the Holy Spirit sharing kindness with every one of her students. The Holy Spirit helped her to show kindness to all her students, not just the bright and friendly ones, and especially toward Teddy Stollard. And it worked. By the end of the school year, Teddy had improved so much that he had caught up with most of his peers.

Teddy's father moved at the end of that school year and took Teddy with him. It was a long time before Mrs. Thompson heard from Teddy again. Unexpectedly, seven years later, she received a note from Teddy that read: "**Dear Mrs. Thompson, I wanted you to know that I will be graduating second in my class.**" Four years later, another note came: "**Dear Mrs. Thompson, I just learned that I will be graduating first in my class. The university has not been easy but I enjoyed my schooling.**" Finally, four years after that Teddy wrote: "**Dear Mrs. Thompson, I am now Theodore Stollard, M.D.. How**

**about that? I wanted you to be the first to know that I am getting married next month, on the 27th to be exact. I wondered if you would come and sit where my mother would have sat if she were still alive. Dad died last year and you are the only family I have now.”**

When my daughter Megan was young she received a pack of seeds with a book order. It contained a mixture of all kinds of seeds: flower and vegetable seeds were mixed in together. We went out behind the house and planted the, having no idea what might come up. Not all of the seeds sprouted, but many sprang up, producing plants far out of proportion to the size of the seeds.

It is the same when we sow seeds of kindness. When we sow kindness we have no idea what may come of it. I know that, over my years as a pastor, I have assisted a lot of people. Most of them seem grateful at the time, many even promise to repay the gift in some way. But most don't. I can count the number of people that I have helped who have come back to repay my kindness on two hands. After awhile I began to worry that I was setting them up to fail, so after awhile I started letting them know that I didn't expect to be repaid. I told them that I was doing it because it was what God's Spirit asked me to do. I did it for God. I then added, that if they wanted to repay the kindness, they could repay God by helping out someone else when they had the chance.

What has come of that? I don't know, but I can't help but think that some of them later passed on that kindness. Why? Because I pointed them in the direction of God, and when God's Spirit gets ahold of us amazing changes begin to happen. My prayer was that some of those I helped would accept Christ and that God's Spirit would produce in them the fruit of the spirit, and if not.... if not.... Well, in Mrs. Thompson's case, even if Teddy Stollard had never amounted to anything, the Holy Spirit still changed her and she became a kinder person.

That is the thing about kindness. On the surface it sounds like the smallest, least important of all the fruits of the Spirit. But like the seeds in my daughters pack, it contains the potential to spring up and produce the greatest fruit of all.

So, let's add another word to the passage we are memorizing and meditating on. Let's add the word "kindness". **"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness."** — Galatians 5:22.