



## **FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – KINDNESS**

Text: 2 Samuel 9:1-12; Ephesians 2:1-10; Galatians 5:22&23

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There is nothing that touches the heart and brings joy to the soul like acts of kindness. When we have grave doubts about our humanity, random acts of kindness bring hope and inspires us. Listen to these quotes: 'Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see'. 'A warm smile is the universal language of kindness'. 'Constant kindness can accomplish much. As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstandings, mistrust and hostility to evaporate.' 'Love and kindness are never wasted. They always make a difference. They bless the one who receives them, and they bless you, the giver.' 'Remember there's no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end.' 'You can accomplish by kindness what you cannot by force'. 'Kindness makes a person attractive. If you would win the world, melt it, do not hammer it.' You get the point. Being kind shines with a light that attracts us. Kindness, gentleness, caring gestures are things that touch and move us. They draw us to others. And yet, strangely, we do not see a real lot of it. In a conversation it was suggested that the word 'kindness' is a bit of a dud word. It can be regarded as wimpish. There are those who feel that kindness carries a cost they are not prepared to pay. It's too time-consuming, too demanding. It is too likely to interfere in their own plans for themselves. For many people kindness has no place in a dog-eat-dog business world or reality TV show. Even in church circles kindness is one of the most under-rated fruit of the Spirit. But if we are to really to live by the Spirit, then kindness is not an inconvenience to be avoided. It is a characteristic to be embraced. It is not just an attitude for those who are sensitive to others. It is an approach to people that is fundamentally right and proper. The Hebrew word for kindness, 'hesed', means literally 'to bow the head, treat courteously and appropriately'. In other words kindness should be our default mode of living. It is simply the way we should treat each other to show decency and respect to a person made in God's image. It is a way of showing reverence for God. Mother Teresa was

asked why she was so kind and caring to the dying in Calcutta. She said she saw Christ in each of them.

We also act with kindness to reveal the character of God in us. Remember that the fruit of the Spirit is the characteristic of God. The concept of the kindness of God plays a very central role in the Bible. Key to understanding the Old Testament is the covenant that God made with Israel. In that covenant God said "*I will be your God and you will be my people.*" The covenant made clear that of all the nations in the world, the people of Israel had a special place in the plan of God. He had promised Abraham that "*through you all the nations will be blessed.*" Now, as we know, Israel showed throughout its long history that it did not deserve special status with God. But no matter what they did God never broke the covenant with them. He always remained faithful and kept blessing them. The word used to describe this special covenant love is 'hesed'. The word has been translated as 'kindness, loving-kindness, love and mercy, steadfast love, covenant love, solidarity.' It is an attitude of gentleness and care linked very closely to faithfulness. God's kindness to Israel is overflowing and astonishing. It is enduring. No matter what Israel did he never gave up on them. We see it displayed so forcefully in Hosea. The prophet was told to marry a prostitute who was constantly unfaithful. Hosea got to feel how God felt about Israel's behaviour. But God could not give her up. Hosea 11: 8 & 9: "*How can I give you up, Ephraim, how can I hand you over, Israel? My heart is changed and my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger...for I am God.*" His kindness and mercy and love were such they would not allow him to abandon his people.

When we look in the New Testament we see that there is an even more detailed expression of divine kindness. The Greek word for kindness is 'chrestotes' or the shortened form 'chrestos'. This word is similar in meaning to 'hesed' It means 'useful, suitable, worthy, pleasant, gracious, generous, doing what is right'. In the Old Testament Israel is drawn to God through his covenantal kindness. In the New Testament we see people again drawn to God by his kindness. In Romans 2:4 Paul writes "*...do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*" Paul is making clear that God's kindness should not be seen as a weakness. People may abuse God's kindness thinking they can get away with sin. But the point of God's kindness is to draw people to himself. It's to bring them to Jesus. God wants to win people over

through kindness, not beat them into submission. An old idea of bringing people to repentance is to hit them over the head with their sinfulness. Then if they don't change straight away to condemn them to hell. Now there is no doubt we must expose sin for what it is and warn people of God's judgement. But it is noteworthy that God uses kindness to break stubborn hearts. And not just kindness to get a result. God genuinely cares and is kind. That is his nature. We need to be careful in evangelism we don't just act kindly to get a conversion. We must genuinely love others and be kind because it is the right. Even if they never become disciples of Jesus.

The prime example of God's kindness towards us is seen in Jesus. In Ephesians 2:6&7 Paul writes "*And God raised us up with Christ, and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*" There is a sense here in which Paul is saying, just how kind God is to us through Jesus we have not and cannot fully grasp. We still sit in a broken world. We know and love God for his kindness shown in Jesus. But it's not always fully seen and felt. But in time God will make everything new. And then the experience of his kindness to us will be so wonderful and spectacular we won't be able to compare it with anything here. As Paul says "*...the incomparable riches of his grace*". Then we will be overawed by the grace of God. Then in the perfection of that place it will really dawn on us what sin is, how obstinate we are. And how gracious and unbelievably kind God is in forgiving us through Jesus. As Titus 3:4ff puts it so wonderfully "*When the kindness and love of God our saviour 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 generously through Jesus Christ our saviour*".

Now in the meantime, before we get to glory where we can fully understand the depth of divine kindness, our task is to use what we do understand of God's kindness as an example for our own behaviour. As Paul puts it in Ephesians 4:32: "*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.*" An example of people showing "*God's kindness*" is seen in the Old Testament story of David and Saul's grandson Mephibosheth. Remember David had spent years staying out of Saul's way, who had been intent on murdering him. Saul had been killed in battle, as well as his son Jonathon. David is now king of Israel and in 2 Samuel 9:3 we read that David asks, "*Is there yet not anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may*

*show the kindness of God?"* David is informed that there was a lame young man called Mephibosheth, who had been injured when his nurse dropped him as a baby. David promptly called for him and committed himself to showing "*God's kindness*". Here was the grandson of his tormentor who caused him so much suffering. The usual practice of those days would have been to have all the family of Saul killed. That way there would be no dispute over who had the right to the throne. But David arranged for Mephibosheth to eat at his table and enjoy the provisions of the palace. That showed something of "*God's kindness*".

If we think practically about developing kindness in our own lives there are three areas we need to develop. First is developing sympathy, developing a mindset by putting ourselves in the other's shoes. As Jesus said "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*" Think how you would feel if you were in that person's situation? If you were lost in the city what would you hope for? Or struggling to understand a new concept, facing the dishes after a day at work, feeling upset after an argument? Think about what you would really need and then go and do that for them. Sometimes we are tuned in to being caring for a particular thing because we remember how it was for us. Other times we may not really understand how another feels. So we may need to use our imagination. Think it through, what would help me along? How would I like to be told? Kindness begins with our minds. It begins with an attitude that remembers how kind God is to us every day. It's an attitude that says I want to show God today in what I do. Like David it says "*To whom I may show the kindness of God?*"

Secondly kindness is developed in us by doing acts of kindness. Think of practical things that can bring a sense of joy and peace into another's life. It may be visiting the sick or the elderly or lonely. Calling someone who is discouraged. Writing a card to encourage a church leader. Doing someone a favour, running an errand, making a phone call, bearing a burden, giving to the needy. Now as you think about these things you will sense that kindness is costly. It takes time, effort, money, to do these things. With our very hectic schedules this is not always easy. True. But is a five minute call to say to someone, 'I was thinking of you and wanted to pray for you', all that time consuming? Does it cost a lot to smile at people on the way to work. Is it that hard to say 'Good morning' and open a door, to ask others if you can get them a coffee as you get yours? Does it cost that much to think a few seconds more about what you

are going to say so that it becomes a kind word and helpful? Kindness can be costly, but nothing compared to what God's kindness to us cost Jesus. If we say we want to worship God as his disciples then kindness is key. Note Micah 6:8 "*With what shall I come before the Lord... He has shown you what is good, ...to act justly, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.*"

Thirdly kindness is developed by an attitude of generosity. There are times we hesitate to be kind because we are worried we will be used. There are those who will milk our generosity. That's true. There are professional beggars in the city. But be careful that doesn't become an excuse. Not everyone who is helped is ungrateful. Many deeply appreciate it, even if they haven't fully said so. On that score we need to think why we are being kind. Are we milking for a compliment, or simply being generous and doing what is right and good. Simply doing what is right and good also means we realise that at times we may be used, but we will still do what is right. So what if we are used sometimes? If we are generous we allow for that. Besides how often don't we misuse the kindness of God? We enjoy his forgiveness in Christ. And then go on doing what we always did, giving little thought to God and his grace. If we have any heart for the lost, any compassion for evangelism we will be very kind people. For nothing so speaks to people as the kindness of God. It is not for nothing that the Salvation Army has such a high standing in our communities. A new Christian wrote to the person whose life had greatly influenced hers. She wrote '*...I had never met anyone like you before. I felt a depth of love and concern as you listened to me and didn't judge me. You tried to understand me, you sympathised and you celebrated with me. You demonstrated kindness and generosity. And not just to me but to other people as well...I found myself really wanting what you had. Now that I have become a Christian I wanted to tell you I am grateful beyond words for how you lived your life in front of me.*' In the early days of Christianity there was some confusion among the pagans as to who the Christians were. As we said the Greek word for kindness is 'chrestos'. The Greek word for Christ is 'Christos'. It was not always clear to those pagans whether God's people were Christ-ians, followers of Christ, or chrest-ians, followers of a religion based on kindness. I think it was a good confusion. It would be wonderful if people in our streets and at work saw us as the most gentle and kind people there are. 'Chrestos' which literally means 'worthy, good, what is right', is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to describe things that were excellent eg. 'very good' figs, 'precious' stones, and 'pure' gold. In other words, there is something

classy about kindness. It sets itself apart from other attitudes in much the same way that ripe figs differ from rotten figs, precious stones are worth more than cheap imitations, and pure gold is so different from the dross in which it is found. So if you want to do things the best way, and show the heart of God, be kind.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- What is 'kindness' as it is described in the Bible? Explain how 'loving kindness' is central to the Biblical concept of 'covenant'?
- How can you, practically, develop 'kindness' in your life? (eg. inspired by God's kindness, sympathy, doing acts of kindness, attitude of generosity).
- What do we mean when we say there is something 'classy' about 'kindness'? (chrestos)