

PF talk – Galatians 5:22 – Kindness – GBCC 24 May 2020

What do you think of when you think of KINDNESS?

You may remember a good deed someone did for you or that you did for someone else.

I suspect most of us wouldn't have to think too long or too hard to remember an act of KINDNESS.

When my wife and I were in Paris some years ago, on a quiet Sunday afternoon I went down to a laundromat to do a load of washing and quickly realised that all the instructions were in French, and nothing in the laundromat seemed to make any sense; I mean, I could see the machines, but they didn't have coin slots; there were other machines that looked like they took coins, but was one of them was a change machine and the other was a detergent dispenser? I just couldn't tell; I couldn't figure out what I needed to do; so I stood there for about 10 minutes alone in this laundromat wondering how I was going to do my washing.

Fortunately a French lady came in with her washing and, I assume by the look on my face, she realised I had no idea what I was doing; I tried my only French phrase "Parlez vous Anglais" which in English means "Do you speak English" and she replied "Non", which in English means "No", I'm pretty sure about that – I might have to check with Mrs Armstrong or Mrs Magrath 😊; but thankfully she helped me; I just started talking in English and she spoke in French, we were just prattling away not understanding a word the other was saying, but with enough pointing and miming she showed me what I needed to do and I managed to wash our clothes; I was very grateful that she didn't ignore me, she showed me KINDNESS.

And other things spring to mind – I have some friends who really looked out for me at times when I've been sad or lonely; also in high school, one of my best mates used to take me on his family holidays at the beach.

I suspect you have some similar memories; these events don't quickly leave us, do they? They're important. KINDNESS is important. It affects us, it moves us, it's one of the important glues of society, of community. We need KINDNESS for our lives and society to feel ok, to feel that their working or functioning; Without KINDNESS our lives and our society all start to feel a little bleak.

And I think most people would agree with me on that. It's not particularly contentious is it? Most people in our society value KINDNESS.

You can log on to websites like Kindness.org & Random Acts of Kindness.org – these are groups that exist to encourage people to do acts of KINDNESS, they believe that it's a worthy pursuit, it has ripple effects, & they try to create some sort of global KINDNESS community affirming 'this is important', 'we're in this together', 'let's give this a go'; and they have a whole range of suggestions – acts or good deeds that you can do to spread KINDNESS; they also have a bunch of quotes, usually from famous people, to encourage you to be kind:

WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD said “When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves.”

MORGAN FREEMAN said “How do we change the world? One random act of KINDNESS at a time”

JANE GOODALL – “What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make”

And it’s not just these organisations, I looked around a little further and found these quotes as well

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT – “The basis of all good human behaviour is KINDNESS.”

The DALAI LAMA said “KINDNESS and compassion are among the principal values that make our lives meaningful. They are a source of lasting happiness and joy. They are the foundation of a good heart...”

I also found this quote though: somewhat more cynically, a French writer, Jules Renard said “Do not ask me to be KIND; just ask me to ACT as though I were.”

This last one, cynical as it is, is important, because I think it is probably a little more in line with the PRACTICE rather than the THEORY. You see the theory is all well and good –we agree KINDNESS is a great thing, and if we all practice KINDNESS it makes us better people and it makes the world a better place.

But do we actually DO IT?

Do we consistently show KINDNESS to those around us? How has your toilet paper shopping gone in the last couple of months? How have you felt when you’ve been scouring the supermarket shelves for pasta and flour? In this catastrophic global flu pandemic, how easy have you found it to buy essentials like hand sanitiser?

I want to suggest today that, for all the good theory on sites like kindness.org and Random Acts of Kindness, we probably give ourselves more credit than we deserve. We probably give ourselves a LOT more credit than we deserve.

You see I asked you a moment ago to think about times in your life when people showed you KINDNESS. Now if I ask you if you can remember times in your life when people have been MEAN to you, does anything spring to mind?

You bet it does; because it does for all of us. All of us can remember receiving KINDNESS and all of us can recall plenty of times in life when people have just been NASTY and downright CRUEL.

Well today we want to have a think about this as we continue looking at the Fruit of the Spirit, as we look at KINDNESS.

Gal 5:22-23:

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, **kindness**, goodness, faithfulness,*
²³ *gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

I want to suggest today that KINDNESS for the Christian, is not about a checklist or about occasionally doing some good deeds to make the world a better place, it's more than that.

KINDNESS for the Christian is about DEVOTION... based on GRACE... enabled by SALVATION... and deeply rooted in the KINDNESS that GOD has shown to us.

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We're going to start with a quick look in the Old Testament – what does the Old Testament have to say about KINDNESS?

There's a number of references to KINDNESS in the Old Testament and we're not going to look through all the passages, but hopefully we'll start to get a feel for the depth of KINDNESS – that KINDNESS is seen in good deeds but there's much more going on than just the good deeds themselves.

Firstly, Israel in exile

Ezra 9:9

⁹ *Though we are slaves, our God has not forsaken us in our bondage. He has shown us **kindness** in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.*

In the time of the prophet Ezra, Israel were in exile in Babylon.

If you're an Israelite, being in exile in Babylon is not the place you want to be. It's a place of despair. It's a place of despair because you're out of the Promised Land. You're experiencing God's judgement.

But it's IN THAT place of despair that we read Ezra 9, where the Israelites experience God's KINDNESS.

What was God's KINDNESS? Miraculously, the Kings of Persia actually allow the Israelites to go home... from captivity... and not only to go home, but they're allowed to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem;

We see the depth of God's KINDNESS – more than a good deed – God provided for his people; God remembered his promises to Abraham and his descendants; God hadn't forgotten Israel, he would once again be their provider and protector.

We also see KINDNESS in the story of RUTH

If you haven't read through the book of Ruth in a while, I encourage you to do so; It's a great little book – only 4 chapters – you could flick through it this week sometime.

In the story of Ruth we read about KINDNESS a number of times, it's basically a KINDNESS-fest.

The story is about Ruth – she's not an Israelite, she's a Moabite woman who marries INTO an Israelite family; Tragedy strikes and all the husbands in the family die, leaving only Ruth, her sister in law and her mother in law, Naomi; Naomi says to her 2 daughters in law, 'Look, just go home to your families, I have nothing to offer you'; Well, the sister-in-law does but Ruth says No. She shows great character and stays with Naomi – and they go home to Bethlehem; A number of important events happen when they return home, but the CRUX OF THE STORY is that Ruth ends up marrying a guy called Boaz; Together they have a son Obed, Obed is then the father of Jesse, and Jesse is then the father of King David. So it's an important story in Israel's history and in the lineage of Jesus.

But where does the KINDNESS come in?

Naomi recognises Ruth's KINDNESS in staying with her;

Boaz shows KINDNESS to Ruth by protecting and providing for her;

Boaz showed that KINDNESS to Ruth because he'd heard of HER KINDNESS to Naomi;

Ruth shows KINDNESS to Boaz in seeking him as a husband and redeemer for the family even though he was an older man;

As the story unfolds we see KINDNESS in the deeds that Ruth and Boaz do, but it's not the good deeds themselves, it's more than that; the KINDNESS is showing great character... it's showing faithfulness... it's showing sacrifice.

Now these are just a couple of examples and we could look at many more, in the PSALMS, and the KINGS, and the EXODUS, but I just want to show here the depth of KINDNESS – when we see KINDNESS in the Old Testament, it's NOT JUST a good deed or generous act, it's bigger than that.

GOD'S KINDNESS is shown in redeeming and providing for his people;

God's PEOPLE show KINDNESS when they display faithfulness, character and sacrifice.

And these examples point us to the KINDNESS we read about in the New Testament.

Titus 3:3-8

³ 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. ⁴ But when the KINDNESS and love of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ 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, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ 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.

It's quite a similar passage to what we've been working through in Galatians isn't it? It's very similar; In our old state, we were lost in our sinful selfish selves, he uses the same language – hate, malice, envy – enslaved by passions and pleasures – verse 3.

But then God stepped in and saved us through Jesus Christ, he gave us rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit – verse 5.

But did you notice the how he described this great act of our salvation?

How he described the event of the gospel? There in verse 4 – the KINDNESS and love of God our Saviour appeared.

That's what KINDNESS is, it's found in the gospel.

If the events in the Old Testament were giving us an inkling that KINDNESS for the Christian is more than just good deeds, then the events in the New Testament leave us in no doubt whatsoever. KINDNESS is defined by the Good Creator, sacrificing His own Son, so that we can be saved.

And I think this is where movements like Random Act of Kindness are going to fall short – if our efforts for KINDNESS aren't grounded in God, then ultimately they can't work, firstly because they don't deal with SIN.

You see, why did God's KINDNESS appear in the first place? There in v3 – we were enslaved in passions and pleasures, living in malice, hate and envy – we were slaves to our sin.

The problem with our world is not primarily a lack of good deeds, the problem is OUR SIN, and if you don't deal with the problem of SIN, then NO AMOUNT of good deeds is going to overcome that. It will simply be like putting a band aid on an open wound.

Have you ever been chopping the veggies and given yourself a really proper deep cut? I was once opening a little tin of corn kernels – just a simple, harmless, innocent looking tin – I remember it looking so harmless – 'It's ok Pete, you can trust me, I'm just a little tin of corn kernels' – but as I ripped the pull top of the can, in a split second, the edge of the nasty little tin lid sliced into my thumb; you can still see the scar running along here – and started bleeding profusely.

At first I tried putting a band aid on it, but it wouldn't stop bleeding; Then I tried putting a bigger band aid on it, still no luck, finally I tried the biggest bandage I could find in the house, wrapped it up, and you can probably guess... that's right it STILL wouldn't stop bleeding.

It became clear that NO EFFORT OF MY OWN was going to stop my thumb bleeding. I COULDN'T DO IT MYSELF. I gave up and wrapped an old t-shirt around my thumb and I drove down to the hospital – ironically I had to drive like *****this*****, essentially doing a

‘thumbs up’ the whole way – but the point is I had to go to hospital so a doctor could fix my thumb, because I couldn’t fix it myself.

Folks, we can’t do it ourselves, our good deeds aren’t enough we read in v5, God saved us through rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, poured out generously through Jesus our Saviour. Our good deeds won’t save us, only Jesus will.

But that’s not the only way in which Human efforts will fall short. If our KINDNESS isn’t grounded in God’s KINDNESS, then I want to suggest that it’ll never go far enough, because we’ll never, or rarely ever, BE KIND to our enemies.

Did you notice in v3 – what was our state when God showed us his KINDNESS? Hate, malice, envy, disobedience...

Jesus says something very similar in Luke 6

Luke 6:35

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is KIND to the ungrateful and wicked.

See the depth and breadth of God’s KINDNESS

You see, we can probably all think of times when we’ve received KINDNESS; We can all probably remember times when we’ve been KIND to someone we like; But how do we go when we try to remember being kind to someone who doesn’t even say thank you; How often have we been kind to people who don’t even like us? Let alone people who HATE us?

This is where the rubber hits the road and human efforts like kindness.org and Random Acts of Kindness again fall short. It might sound like I’m beating up on these groups that are, you know, trying to do some good in the world – I’m not – I’m trying to say that it falls short.

When I scroll through their suggestions for KINDNESS there are some great ones – like giving blood; donating blankets to a dog shelter; or befriending the new kid at school – those are all good things to do.

But then there’s also some pretty weak ones as well – use public transport; pay your bills online; water your plants; take a bath or take a nap.

When you skim through the lists of KIND things to do, you see very little about being KIND to the ungrateful and wicked; very little about loving your enemy.

And why would you?

If KINDNESS is not grounded in our good God, if it’s just about people choosing to do good deeds and make the world a better place, then it lacks the radical depth and breadth of God’s KINDNESS, and it can never motivate us like God’s KINDNESS.

No, it’s God’s KINDNESS that reached out to us when WE were at our WORST. It’s only God’s KINDNESS that can motivate us to be KIND to the ungrateful and wicked.

How do we actually do this? As a Christian, how do we DO KINDNESS? Well, there's a couple of things, firstly we need to put to death our old acts of the flesh.

Remember in our passage in Galatians we've been looking at the acts of the flesh vs the fruit of the Spirit; the two things don't go hand-in-hand, they fight against each other, they butt heads; they're pulling in opposite directions.

If you go over the acts of the flesh that Paul lists, there's some pretty obvious things that are directly holding us back from KINDNESS; things like hate and envy.

Now most of us would say 'Well I kinda know that, I don't really think those are good things, I don't pursue them'; and I agree, but do we actively fight against them, or do we just make a little room for them in the back of our heart?

Note the strong language Paul uses in Galatians 5:24

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

You see I think we often miss the weight of this; we don't see our sin as being crucified, hanging on a cross, we just see it as minimised. I mean, I can't completely get rid of hate and envy, I'll just water it down a bit; I'll just put it in the back room of my life and only take it out from time to time.

Paul says no.

Our hate, our envy – these things are in direct conflict with KINDNESS. All of these things are holding us back, and in God's strength we need to kill them off;

I've been watching 'The Last Dance' on Netflix lately – for 90s tragics like me, it's a great trip down memory lane – it's all about Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls in the 90s; If you were a kid like me, growing up in the 90s it was very difficult not to be a Bulls fan; I mean, Michael Jordan was the GOAT right? The greatest of all time, it was just beautiful watching him play; I was a HUGE Chicago Bulls fan.

Anyway at one point a player called Dennis Rodman joined the Chicago Bulls; now if you're not a basketball fan, that's not going to mean much to you, so let me explain Dennis Rodman used to play for the Detroit Pistons, and the Detroit Pistons were the ENEMY; these teams HATED each other; the Detroit Pistons used to always beat the Chicago Bulls, LITERALLY, they used to beat them up during the games; and NOW Dennis Rodman changed teams! It was almost scandalous; He was now PLAYING for the ENEMY.

Now just imagine if, in his first game for Chicago, Dennis Rodman said to his new team mates, 'Guys, I know I play for this team now... but I still kind of like my old team as well. I think I'm just going to play the first 5 minutes for them, and then I'll come back and play the rest of the game for us, ok?'

How do you think that would go down?

It would be nonsense right? You're either playing for THEM or you're playing for US. You CANNOT play on both teams, we're playing against each other; you HAVE to pick one.

Folks, there's simply no room for us to let hate and envy linger in our hearts; We have to kill it off; We have to confess our sin to God and ask for his strength to kill it off; we have to CRUCIFY it.

We CAN'T have it both ways – we can try to hang on to our hate and envy, or we can pursue KINDNESS.

And lastly, what do we need to do? We devote ourselves to doing good.

Titus 3:8

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.

We devote ourselves to doing good, inspired and motivated by what our good God has done for us.

That's what KINDNESS is... KINDNESS for the Christian is not a checklist. It's not a progress chart. It's not a bunch of good deeds, it's more. It's so much more.

It's DEVOTION... based on GRACE... enabled by SALVATION... and deeply rooted in the KINDNESS that God has shown to us.

Emily Dickinson has a poem:

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

It's a lovely poem and a nice sentiment, and I'm sure many people have found some solace in that, when they feel their life hasn't amounted to much, they can still find meaning or worth in having helped just one person, just one life. It's a comforting thought.

But folks, as much as I love the poem, it is simply blown away by Titus chapter 3, by the KINDNESS of God to the ungrateful and wicked, a KINDNESS that saved us from our helpless state so that we can now DEVOTE ourselves to doing good, even doing good to our enemies.

Let's REMIND ourselves of the KINDNESS God has shown us in Jesus

Let's put to DEATH the SINS that hold us back: HATE... and ENVY

Let's DEVOTE ourselves to doing good

Let's pray

Kindness

Titus 3:3-8

24 May 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Peter Fletcher

Discussion Questions

1. Why do we need kindness in our lives? Why is it a worthy pursuit?
2. Do we think that we're kinder than we actually are? Do you think we give ourselves more credit than we deserve? Why/why not?
3. What did you find helpful from Peter's definition of kindness?

Devotion, based on grace, enabled by salvation, deeply rooted in God's kindness.

4. Morgan Freeman said: "How do we change the world? One act of kindness at a time." Do you think that's true?
5. Is there more to kindness than just good deeds?
6. How does God show a better kind of kindness at the Cross?
7. How do we actively put to death envy and strife (Titus 3:3)?
8. What does it look like to devote yourself to doing good things (Titus 3:8)?