Daily God Walk
Virtues Series
Kindness

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Paul T. Smith

Day One

Kindness Is A Fruit Of The Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit is… kindness… Against such there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. – Galatians 5:22-23

There are several words in our language that have a meaning similar to kindness. Usually when we can say that a person is kind we can also say that they are gentle, or we can say that they are considerate. Those are common characteristics of kindness.

It intrigues me that in verses 19-21 there are character traits mentioned that we have often seen displayed among people we know. Of those traits, or behaviors, Paul writes, "Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." But the next verse he lists contrasting behaviors, or characteristics, of a person who lives by the Spirit of God. Of those things he writes, "Against such things there is no law."

There is such a stark contrast between the works of our sinful nature and the fruit, or virtues, of the Spirit that it should be easy to detect the underlying motivations that are driving a person. Is it our natural person filled with all manner of character flaws that drive us, or is it the Spirit of God that drives us? We can tell by the fruit of our lives.

I know a person who is always having God tell him what to do, but he is impatient with people, he is not courteous, and he is certainly not considerate of others. When I observe him I wonder, "Is he really hearing from God, or is he just acting out his own will and hiding under the banner of "This is what God told me?"

Do you struggle with being kind, particularly to those who irritate you? Do you find yourself being harsh with others? Is it hard for you give a soft answer when someone approaches you in anger? It could be that you are responding in the way a natural person would respond instead of allowing God's Spirit to and character to live through you. Something to think about.

Prayer: Lord, I don't always do well at allowing your character to live through me. I ask you for the ability, and desire, to surrender my natural person to you and come under the authority of your word and will. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: There is a stark contrast between the works of our sinful nature and spiritual fruit.

Affirmation: When I realize that I am beginning to respond to people and circumstances in my old sinful nature I consciously submit to Holy Spirit so His fruit is manifest.

Reflection: Do people irritate you when they don't agree with you? Do you have unkind thoughts about those with whom you disagree? You may have a problem with your old nature creeping in. Think about it.

Day Two

Love is... Kind

Love is... kind.... It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Many of us have had at least one person who has impacted our lives with kindness. I have a friend by the name of Bob that has impressed me over the years. He has gone through many difficult situations in his life, including being mistreated by those who he has trusted, but I have never heard him say an unkind thing about anyone. Bob is kind and has a gentle spirit.

A few years ago I became ill with my heart and could not travel in the ministry like I had been doing. Talking on the phone one day Bob said to me, "You know, God may be allowing this to happen to slow you down so that you can develop a ministry of writing." In his kind way Bob was reminding me that God was in control and that there just might be other ministry open for me.

Since that time I have written several books and the Daily God Walk is a direct result of that conversation. We are in the sixth year of writing the Daily God Walk. God used the kindness of my friend to guide me into a completely new realm of ministry.

The Greek word here translated "kind" is *chresteuomai*. It simply means to show one's self mild, to be kind, use kindness (Thayer). It is a characteristic

of God's love within us to be kind. When we are submitted to God and his Spirit is working in us then kindness will flow from us.

It is interesting that you will rarely encounter a genuinely kind person who is given to envy, or to boasting, or to pride. The primary reason this is true is that a kind person is not self-seeking, is not easily angered and doesn't keep record of the wrongs others have done him. A kind person is genuinely motivated by God's love.

Are you a person who is motivated by God's love?

Prayer: Lord, it isn't always easy to be kind. In fact, sometimes it is just really hard. I need your grace to be kind even when I am mistreated. Amen.

Message: It is a characteristic of God's love in us to be kind toward others, especially those who don't treat us well.

Affirmation: I am committed to showing God's love through being kind to others, even those who do not accept me and who do not treat me kindly.

Reflection: The devotion mentions that you will rarely encounter a genuinely kind person who is given to envy, or to boasting, or to pride. Reflect on the question of what makes a person kind and what causes some to be unkind.

Day Three

Kindness Offers Hospitality

Love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

– 1Peter 4:8-10

How does love cover over a multitude of sins? Notice that it does not say that love removes the sin, but that it covers it over. Another way to say it is that believers do not cease to express love to those who are sinning, but they continue to extend kindness and hospitality. The Message seems to express this passage well. It reads:

> "Love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to the homeless – cheerfully. Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it."

Over the years we have ministered to many people who were not fully restored. They were still wrestling with sins in their life, yet we continued to extend kindness to them. As time has passed we have seen among those folks a maturing and growing into a lifestyle that is pleasing to God. That would not have happened if we had been so concerned about their sin that we could not be kind and hospitable to them.

Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit that is winsome and attractive to people who need to see God's love in action. An interesting characteristic of being kind is that it is not passive. One cannot be kind by doing nothing; kindness demands action. Peter says, "Offer hospitality to one another," and adds, "without grumbling."

God has given much to all of us. We may not have a lot of the material things that the world seeks after, but he has given us the riches of heaven that cannot be affected the way material things can be affected. It is these riches of heaven that we are called to share with the world. Kindness (love) does cover a multitude of sins.

Prayer: Lord, I haven't done a very good job of covering the sins of others with your love. Grant me the grace to extend kind hospitality to others, so that they can see your love in action. Amen.

Message: Believers do not cease to express love to those who are sinning, but they continue to extend kindness and hospitality.

Affirmation: I cannot condone the sin of the unbeliever, but I can show them the love of God through kindness and hospitality.

Reflection: Read carefully The Message rendering of this passage in 1 Peter and reflect on these ideas: love as if your life depended on it; be quick to give to those in need - and give cheerfully; Be generous with the different things God gave you.

Day Four

Enduring Kindness is A Fruit of the Spirit

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in… patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love. - 2 Corinthians 6:3-7

One of the frustrations that the apostle Paul faced was people who tried to discredit his ministry. Because of that he often feels compelled to validate his call. In this passage he writes much more than what we have written in the text. He speaks of hardships, beatings, being misunderstood, and more. Yet, he adds that he has endured with patience and kindness in the Holy Spirit.

It is not natural to be kind to those who are not kind to us. It runs against the grain. Everything in us tells us to defend ourselves, get ready for battle. But the Holy Spirit compels us to respond with kindness. It is a grace of God that enables us to endure hardship and rejection and still feel compelled by the Holy Spirit to endure with patience, returning kindness for unkindness.

Paul had the unique ability to stay focused on the task at hand and not be deterred by the circumstances around him. He begins this chapter with, "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain." His objective is to help the Corinthian believers to continue in faith and grow in grace. He knew their ability to receive was measured by his

patience and kindness – and he knew that he could only produce the fruit of kindness through the Holy Spirit.

Just a little warning about being patient and kind: If you try it in your own power you are headed for burn-out. We can only take misunderstanding and rejection for so long then something has to give. We become emotionally exhausted which leads to discouragement and sometimes leads to depression. We must appeal to the Holy Spirit for his strength and submit to his guidance so that the fruit of our lives is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Lord, trying to be kind at all times in my own strength is emotionally exhausting. Grant me the grace of this fruit of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: The Holy Spirit compels us to respond with kindness to those who mistreat us. It is a grace of God that enables us to endure hardship and rejection while returning kindness.

Affirmation: Even when others treat me badly and reject me I seek God for the grace to return kindness for their unkindness.

Reflection: What did Paul mean by, "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain"?

Day Five

Add Kindness To Your Faith

Make every effort to add to your faith... brotherly kindness...For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. - 2 Peter 1:5-8

Most of us who have ever bought a new car have a list of add-ons that are important to us. Things like CD player, air conditioning, power steering, power windows, and the list can be quite long. What we need is basic transportation that can get us from point A to point B, but we have found that the trip is much easier if we have these certain features added on to our basic vehicle.

The message Peter is trying to get across here is that when we come to Christ in faith we gain access to heaven's best, and our destination is heaven itself. We are going from point A, where we were in life when we came to Christ, to point B, heaven, our final destination. Peter gives us some add-ons for the journey.

Brotherly kindness is one of those add-ons. In the original Greek this word is *philadelphia*. Does that word look familiar? That's right, it's the very same word as Philadelphia, the city in Pennsylvania. They call it the city of brotherly love because that is what the word means. Peter is saying in this passage that one of the add-ons to our faith should be brotherly love, or as the NIV puts it, "brotherly kindness."

We are not alone in our journey of faith. We are surrounded by others who are making the journey with us and we must acknowledge our need of them as well as their need of us. That is what brotherly kindness does. As we give ourselves to being considerate and helpful to others in the faith, and they give themselves to being compassionate and serving to us, then our journey becomes more pleasant.

When we add brotherly kindness to our faith we are strengthening our own faith walk and the faith walk of our brothers and sisters.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the ability to see my brother's need of me and my nee of him on this journey, and the grace to give and receive kindness. Amen.

Message: We are surrounded by others who are making the journey with us and we must acknowledge our need of them as well as their need of us.

Affirmation: I am sensitive to others who are with me on this journey of faith and I show them the same kindness I would want when I am in need.

Reflection: The example is used of making a journey in a new car with many add-ons which make the journey better. How does that compare with adding to our faith?

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Day Six

Sharing With Others Is Kindness In Action

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has not pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

- 1 John 3:17-18

Serving others in need is loving your brother indeed! One of the marks of the Christian faith is the gifts of kindness that has been given to the world. Medical missionaries have brought health and healing to impoverished countries around the world. Most of the hospitals around our country were started by Christians to serve their community.

The list of Christian benevolence is long. Without the love of God moving in the hearts of believers much of the good that is done would never be accomplished. Giving and serving is not just a teaching of the church but it is a command of God. We are instructed to love, not with words but with deeds of kindness.

The Apostle John felt so strongly about this that he wrote in verse 19, "This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence." He seems to be implying that if we don't demonstrate our love by unselfishly giving in kindness to others, then our hearts won't be at rest and we will feel a certain sense of condemnation.

The love of God drives us to invest ourselves in the others. If we are just investing in ourselves, our own comfort and our own security, then we are not fulfilling the call God has placed on our lives when we accepted his grace.

John summarizes the teaching of Jesus in these words, “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Love God and love others, that’s it. How do we demonstrate that we love others? By being kind and sharing with those in need.

Prayer: Lord, So often I complain of not having enough. Others have nicer homes, newer cars and better clothes. Help me not to focus on what I don’t have, but to see what others need and share with them. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth - 1 John 3:18

Affirmation: I know that words of love are empty without actions that prove love, therefore in love I do acts of kindness to others.

Reflection: Reflect on how the love of God has led believers to serve the needy of the world. Ask yourself, "How am I serving others?" If loving others, and serving them, is the evidence of loving God would others see enough evidence in your life to convict you if serving others was a crime?

Day Seven

Fruit of Spirit: Kindness To Those In Need

The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends. He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

– Proverbs 14:20-21

A few years ago my wife and I had a ministry of transitional housing for homeless, drug addicted families, and I discovered an interesting phenomenon. When they found the Lord and had been clean for several months their attitude toward their old friends changed.

When one of their old friends would want to come into our program they would get us alone and say something like, "You don't want to bring them in. I know them and they are users and dealers. They won't be good for the program." We would look at them and say, "And just what were you six months ago?"

People are not much different today than they were in Bible times. There are people who are poor because of circumstances beyond their control, and there are people who are poor because of their own behaviors. But the needy are the needy and the Bible doesn't seem to draw a line that says, "those on that side of the line do not deserve our kindness."

Some are shunned by their neighbors, and some of us are the ones doing the shunning. There are two very important words in this passage. The first is in verse 20. The NIV reads "Shunned" and the KJV reads, "Hated." The Hebrew word is *sawnay* the primary

meaning of this word is “hate” and one meaning of the word is “odious.” The other word is “despises” and is found in verse 21. This word actually means to disrespect or despise. We could say that when we find our neighbor odious (they stink) we tend to treat them with disdain.

What does God say about these odious ones? “Whoever is kind to the needy honors God.” Give that idea some thought; when you disrespect one of these you have disrespected God – When you are kind to one of these you are kind to God.

Prayer: Lord, I don’t always do this well because I tend to find some people rather odious. Help me to see people as you see them and to see them as an opportunity to extend your grace. Amen.

Message: There is no line drawn which says the people on the other side of the line don't need kindness.

Affirmation: I pray for grace to truly love, and to be kind to those who many would consider unlovely. I cannot draw a line and discount those on the other side of the line.

Reflection: There is an attitude in many communities concerning ministries which serve the needy that is expressed by the acronym NIMBY which stands for "Not In My Back Yard." Reflect on the attitude that projects and test yourself to see if you don't have a little NIMBY in you.

Day Eight

The Lord Delights in Kindness

"Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord.

– Jeremiah 9:24

Have you known people who declare that they know the Lord, but they are not kind? They have a strong sense of what's right and wrong, but their justice is not tempered with mercy and they aren't kind to those who are not in agreement with their position.

God says, "If you know me; if you understand me – then you will be kind because you know that I delight in kindness." If we get hung up on justice alone we will miss the value of grace and mercy. When we are measuring people by their apparent righteousness then we miss the opportunity to lead them into the righteousness that is only found in Christ.

I have discovered an interesting principle. When we are kind then we see justice through mercy and righteousness through Christ. When our base motivation is to demand justice and judge righteousness, then we cut short the grace of God and his mercy cannot be manifest.

We once counseled a woman who had enormous anger issues. She would physically fight other women

over any disagreement. I was about to judge her harshly when she told me about her background. She had been sexually abused by her father from the age of five. At about eight he shared her with other men. By the time she was a teenager she was a prostitute and hooked on heroin.

This poor woman was being judged for behavior that she had developed as a survival mechanism in response to the most horrendous abuse you could imagine. Justice demanded judgment for her actions, but grace and mercy demanded kindness. We chose to be kind to her. The result was that she got gloriously saved and God filled her with his wonderful Spirit. The Lord delights in kindness.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the heart to be kind to others, to look past their error and see the potential for your righteousness in them. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: If we are hung up on justice alone we will miss the value of grace and mercy.

Affirmation: Even when I can clearly see the black and white of a matter I do not allow my sense of justice to negate the need for grace and mercy.

Reflection: The text of the devotion states, "When we are kind then we see justice through mercy and righteousness through Christ." Reflect on how having a kind heart tempers our need to see justice fulfilled.

Day Nine

His Kindness Is Everlasting

The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, who hath mercy on thee.

- Isaiah 54:10 (KJV)

Everything in this material world around us is temporal, it will all pass away at some point, but all that is God; his attributes, character, and his word, shall never pass away. Who he is and what he has promised can be trusted beyond time into eternity. He has made a covenant of peace with those who will trust him and because of that his kindness will never cease.

This passage is in a section of Isaiah that is promising restoration to the people of God. They had been kept away from their land for many years. Their city had been destroyed and their lands inhabited by strangers. Now God is telling them that their time of suffering is over, and they will be returning to the land. He promises, "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise: (verse11).

How often we have gone through storms in life that left us feeling destroyed, left desolate and alone. We may be there as a result of the choices we have made, or it may just be that we are caught in circumstances beyond our control. In those times we feel that there is no answer, and we often begin to feel that there is

no hope. Then, God steps in and begins to remind us of his promises.

God has promised that his kindness shall not depart from us. He has made a covenant of peace with us when we received Christ into our heart and he will be faithful to that covenant. It is the covenant of peace that he made with us which demands that he be kind to us, and he is kind.

Remember the kindness of the Lord, particularly when the circumstances around us are not comfortable. Do not forget his covenant of peace in Christ – It is that covenant that provides mercy and releases his kindness upon us.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for the covenant of peace that has opened the door for your kindness to be shown to me. I praise you in Jesus name, amen.

Message: God has made a covenant of peace with us when we received Christ into our heart and he will be faithful to that covenant.

Affirmation: God has promised that his kindness shall not depart from me and He has made a covenant of peace with me when I received Christ into my heart and he will be faithful to that covenant.

Reflection: In reflection today remember a time in your life when God showed his kindness to you in the midst of trying situation.

Day Ten

The Lord Is Abounding In Compassionate Love

He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. – Exodus 34:5-7

God had given Moses the law and the Ten Commandments. Moses came down off the mountain carrying the stone tablets and discovered Israel dancing around a golden calf. In anger he smashed the stone tablets and pronounced a judgment on those who worshipped the calf.

The next day mercy and compassion called him back to the mountain to ask the Lord to grant repentance to the people. It was during this time of seeking God that the Lord passed in front of Moses proclaiming that he is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Moses learned something about God, and he learned something about himself in this experience. He learned that his anger could cause him to do things he would later regret, but through the grace of God, he would be forgiven. He also learned that even though God was offended by the actions of the people, he continued to love them forgiving their wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Those are two lessons we need to learn. When we have been angered over the shortcomings of others we

must be careful how we respond and if we respond in a harsh manner then we must also be willing to repent. We must be willing to show the same kindness and compassion as God and that is not easy.

It took a long time on the mountain for Moses to get to the place where God could reveal more of his nature to him and it is the same for us. The virtue of kindness does not just come upon us arbitrarily, rather, it is a trait of the Holy Spirit that is developed in us as we spend time with God.

Like Moses, we must go to the mountain, and we must seek his face so that his kindness and compassion can flow through us.

Prayer: Lord, help me to not be guided by anger and dispense judgment that is not tempered by your grace of compassion and kindness. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: The virtue of kindness does not just come upon us arbitrarily, rather, it is a trait of the Holy Spirit that is developed by spending time with God.

Affirmation: Your loving kindness O God has been birthed in my heart by your abiding presence.

Reflection: It would be good to read the entire chapter 34 of Genesis. This chapter reveals the kindness of God as well as desire to bless his people. Reflect on the two sides of God presented in this chapter; the forgiving merciful God and the stern law giving God.

Day Eleven

Lending Freely Releases Blessing

I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed. - Psalm 37:25-26

I have heard this passage quoted many times by people who have a need, or to encourage people who have a need, but I have never heard it quoted with verse 26, "They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed."

It appears that the sought after blessing is connected to the generosity and kindness of the one who is seeking the blessing. We have all known those folks along the way who are always in need, but they are very slow about being generous and kind to others.

I have a friend who is with the Lord now, but until he passed away he was the most giving person I have ever met. I never knew him to have much money, but he always had enough to bless others. He never went hungry, and his family never suffered poverty, but no one would call him rich. They were generously giving out about 40,000 pounds of food every month, but they lived very frugally themselves.

Were the children of this man blessed? Oh, yes indeed! All of his children have positions of responsibility and make several times more money than their father did. They are all in the church and serving God too.

Do you want to be blessed with a full pantry and blessed with prosperous children? Learn to give generously and lend to those in need freely. On the idea of being kind to those in need Proverbs 19:17 says, “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.”

God loves his children just as we love our children and he delights in blessing them generously. However, like us, he trains his children to be kind by withholding blessing when they are selfish and blessing generously when they are kind to others. Has he been blessing you lately?

Prayer: Lord, grant me the ability to see the needs of others, to give generously and grant me the grace to trust you for my own provision. Amen.

Message: The righteous are always generous and lend freely and because of that their children will be blessed.

Affirmation: The Lord is faithful and I know that I will never be lacking what I need because he is generous to those who are generous with others.

Reflection: Think about those you have known who have often had their hand out for a blessing. Have you seen them giving to others and investing the life of others? Ask yourself, "Am I more interested in getting than giving?"

Day Twelve

Christ Had Compassion On the Hurting

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. - Matthew 9:35

Jesus had the ability to see something in the crowds that others did not see and what he saw moved him with compassion. Others saw masses of people crowding around him, demanding something from him; but he saw people with needs that he could answer.

There was a time when a very sick woman managed to get close enough to touch the very hem of his garment. He felt the touch as her faith drew from him the healing she so desperately needed. When he asked, "Who touched me?" his disciples said "There are many people crowding around you and you ask, "Who touched me?" They only saw the crowds, but he saw the needs.

Another time there was a blind beggar who cried out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." His disciples tried to get him to be quiet because they felt he was disturbing the Master, but he cried out all the more and Jesus heard his cry.

Jesus not only saw the crowds, but he saw their hurt and was moved with compassion for them. He saw the people as harassed by the political, social and economic conditions around them. He saw they felt helpless to change the circumstances of their lives. They were truly wandering, feeling lost, like sheep

without a shepherd. How did he respond to this needy? His response was to challenge his followers to pray for workers among the hurting (verses 37-38).

Jesus has challenged believers to ask the Lord to send laborers into the fields of frustrated people. He is calling us to enter those fields with compassion driven deeds of kindness that will see them healed of their hurts.

Chapter nine ends with calling believers to prayer and chapter ten begins by answering that prayer himself as he sends those same believers into the fields. Have you prayed for the harvest? Are you ready to enter the harvest field?

Prayer: Lord, I tend to see the crowds just as crowding people. Give me a heart of compassion to see their need and respond with kindness. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: When we see the need of others we are moved with compassion and to deeds of kindness.

Affirmation: When I see the needs of those around me, I am moved with compassion because, like Jesus, I can see that they are harassed, helpless and like sheep without a shepherd.

Reflection: Jesus looked beyond the surface of the crowd and saw the people themselves. When he looked closely at them he saw their need. What do you see when you look at people?

Day Thirteen

There Is Comfort In His Kindness

In that day you will say: "I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me… Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world." - Isaiah 12:1-6

All of us have gone through times when it seemed God was angry with us. When we prayed it was as if he was deaf and when we reached toward him it seemed that his arm was too short to reach us. Some of those times were just times of waiting, and some of those times came because of our own behaviors.

The book of Isaiah is a record of prophecies about the future of Israel and of the people of God. He speaks of God's judgment for the wrongdoings of the people, and he speaks of restoration. Chapter 12 is about the salvation that comes after a period of hardship and separation from God's blessing.

When a time of blessing comes after a time of hardship the Lord seems to be especially kind. It is like being caught in a storm and finally getting to a place of warmth and comfort. My family was once caught in a snow storm and we spent about 12 hours as captives in the car. My young son said, "This is the worst day of my life." Then we finally were able to get to a motel where there was a warm and comfortable bed. We had hope that we would again be warm, but when we reached the motel we were truly comforted.

Even in hard times we can have hope, but even that hope is not nearly as comfortable as the reality of being restored to a place of blessing. In those times we agree with Isaiah, "Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me."

There is joy that comes when hard times end and we are comforted by the kindness of the Lord. When that joy comes we want to sing to the world, "Great is the Holy One of Israel." Rejoice and let the world know that he is kind.

Prayer: Lord, I tend to become frustrated when times are hard and you seem far away. Grant me the grace to endure so that I am ready when your kindness brings comfort. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: There is joy that comes when hard times end and we are comforted by the kindness of the Lord.

Affirmation: When I am in the midst of trying times I have hope because I know that the kindness of the Lord will give me comfort in the trial and he will restore my joy.

Reflection: The prophet writes of a time when the Lord was angry with him, but the time of anger was followed by a time of being comforted. Can you relate to that feeling of God not being near, yet when you called he came and comforted you?

Day Fourteen

God's Sternness Is Tempered By His Kindness

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. – Romans 11:22-23

In this chapter Paul is writing about the relationship God had with the Jews. God had intended that the Jews, the Biblical Israel, would be the heralds of the grace of God to the world, but they rejected the one who came to be their Christ. When they rejected Jesus as their Christ, God then turned to the Gentiles.

Paul uses the picture of a tree and the way an arborist will graft in the branch of another variety. The new branch will produce fruit on the tree it was grafted into. He is saying that the sternness of God led to Israel being a branch cut off and the kindness of God is that the Gentiles were grafted in.

There is interesting insight given as to the nature of God in this passage. The original word translated "sternness" can also be translated "decisiveness." The idea is that of one who establishes the terms of relationship and holds others accountable to those terms. Then there is the concept of "kindness." On the one hand you have sternness toward those who

don't accept the terms, and kindness toward those who do accept the terms.

What are the terms of one's relationship with God? "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." It's just as simple as that.

When we believe that Jesus is Lord of our life, that he died for our sins, and that he rose from the dead to give us life, we have met the terms of the relationship and God releases his kindness to us.

Even though Israel was cut off from the tree, Individual Jews can still discover the kindness of God by accepting Jesus as their Lord. The kindness of God releases his favor on all who believe.

Prayer: Lord, I know that you hold steadfast to the terms you have established for our relationship, grant me the faith to meet your terms. Amen.

Message: Kindness and sternness are two sides of a coin. God is stern toward those who are in disobedience to his law but he is kind to those follow him.

Affirmation: I am blessed by the kindness of God because I have committed myself to following him closely.

Reflection: The word translated "sternness" can also be translated "decisiveness." How do you see those two words being related? Explore the contrast between the sternness of God and the kindness of God.

Day Fifteen

Kind Words Encourage The Discouraged

An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up. - Proverbs 12:25

Over the years I have noticed an incredible phenomena. A sure way to get a lift when I feel a little down is to visit an elderly person who has been in the faith a long time. There is just something about hearing words of faith from someone who has been living it for many decades that is encouraging.

I have a precious friend who is a retired minister. Harry is about 80 and very active. Every time I see him in church he will say something like, "You're looking good – how do you stay so young?" That's encouraging.

How about it; can you think of anyone who offers you just a few words when you see them but those words help to make your day good? Those people are a joy to be around. Schedule times of being with those people who speak words of encouragement to you.

"An anxious heart weighs a man down." Very often when we begin to think about our circumstances we can become anxious. There are the bills that just keep on coming, and the money that just keeps on going. There are the people in our life who just don't understand what we're going through and as a result they are not sensitive to our emotional needs. Does that sound familiar?

"But a kind word cheers him up." In the middle of those stressful times the Lord will send someone by to

speak words of faith to us and encourage us to keep on keeping on. It may be an old friend, a pastor, or it could be a total stranger in the grocery store, but just a few words of faith and inspiration changes our whole outlook on life.

Looking at the other side of this picture I want to ask you this question: Who are you encouraging on a regular basis? Just a few words of kindness to someone who is a little discouraged will lift their spirits – and give you a boost as well.

Prayer: Lord, there are times when I am anxious about the circumstances of life. Grant me the grace to take faith from the encouraging words of others, and to speak words of faith to those who need encouragement. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up. - Proverbs 12:25

Affirmation: I know the value of an encouraging word when I am weighed down with anxious thoughts, therefore I will offer kind words to those who are weighed down with worry.

Reflection: A few words of kindness to another person can be the difference between a good day and a discouraging day. Who are you encouraging on a regular basis? Just a few words of kindness to someone who is a little discouraged will lift their spirits – and give you a boost as well. Think about it.

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Day Sixteen

Being Kind To The Least Is Being Kind To God

Then the king will say…"Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you… for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink." - Matthew 25:34-36

Jesus gives three parables about serving in this chapter. The first parable, the ten virgins, is about being prepared for service. The second parable, the three servants, is about being diligent in service. The third parable, separating the sheep from the goats, is about what we are supposed to be doing in service.

Many years ago the story of the sheep and the goats abruptly got my attention. I had been rather haughty about not knowing any poor and needy families, though I was pastor of a good-sized church. My statement was, "Those people don't hang around my ministry."

Then the Holy Spirit spoke strongly to my heart in this passage. In this story the king was saying to the sheep, "***I was hungry*** and you gave me something to eat, ***I was thirsty*** and you gave me something to drink…" Then he says in verse 40, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." For the first time I saw serving people in need as serving Jesus himself.

The Holy Spirit was not finished with me yet. He then led me to Revelation chapter three and the church of Laodicea. That is the church which thought they had everything and needed nothing.

In verse 20 Jesus is standing at the door of that church, knocking, waiting to be invited in. The Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, "I am the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the drug addicts, that you won't let in. I cannot come in until you let them in."

That visit from the Holy Spirit changed my life. Since then our ministry has focused on reaching out to people in need and we have seen literally hundreds of families redeemed and restored. Being kind to the needy is being kind to God.

Prayer: Lord, I am grateful that you have forgiven my haughtiness and have given me the opportunity to serve you by serving those in need. Amen.

Message: Jesus is saying, "I am the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the drug addicts, that you won't let in. I cannot come in until you let them in."

Affirmation: I see Jesus in the face of the most needy and helpless in our world. Serving them is serving God.

Reflection: The heart of God calls out, "Feed them, clothe them, comfort them, visit them." How are you responding to that call?

Day Seventeen

Kindness Asks Us To Be Forgiving

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- Ephesians 4:32

I have a friend whose father was terribly abusive to him as he was growing up. To this day, even though he hasn't seen his father in over 20 years, his anger and unforgiveness toward his father still controls his life. Forgiving others is more than being kind to them, it is also releasing us from the effects of unforgiveness.

Even though we may not have suffered such severe abuse, all of us have had the occasion to carry unforgiveness toward others. It may have been as small as something you overheard someone say about you, or it could have been a betrayal of trust. Whatever the offense, the Lord says that forgiving them is the kind and compassionate thing to do.

Jesus is our great example concerning the attitude we should have toward those who have mistreated us in some way. Hanging on the cross he cried, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Not one of us has received the level of abuse that Jesus received, yet he forgave the offenders.

The reason Jesus could forgive is that he was looking beyond himself and the abuse he was suffering. He could see the big picture. He saw the purpose for his coming and the benefit that would come to the world because of his willing sacrifice.

We are not Jesus, and the effect of our being able to forgive those who mistreat us will certainly not be as far reaching as his forgiveness, but it will affect those we forgive. When we look past ourselves and see the big picture we realize that the abuses that happen to us are not worth the cost of not being able to forgive.

Unforgiveness affects all concerned – but so does forgiveness. When we forgive others for their offenses a kindness and compassion is released toward them that opens the door of God's blessing to flow to them and to us as well.

Prayer: Lord, it isn't easy to be forgiving when we have been mistreated by others. Grant me a heart of compassion and the ability to forgive. Amen.

Message: When we forgive others for their offenses a kindness and compassion is released toward them that opens the door of God's blessing to flow to them and to us as well.

Affirmation: Holy Spirit living in me has moved me to love those who have been offensive to me and to return kindness to them. In doing that God's grace and compassion is released to them and to myself as well.

Reflection: I recently saw this on a church marquee: The heaviest load to carry is a grudge. Unforgiveness does not affect the unforgiven but it certainly does affect those who will not forgive. How has forgiveness, or unforgiveness affected your life?

Day Eighteen

Kindness Does Not Return Evil For Evil

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person... If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. - Matthew 5:38-39

The old law encouraged equal justice; "An eye for an eye." Jesus introduces a new law; "Do not resist an evil person." The old law taught that the response to an injustice could not be greater than the injustice itself. Jesus taught that we, as believers, should be a reflection of the grace and mercy of God.

Poneros is the Greek word translated evil. It is a noun and refers to a person rather than an action. It refers to one who is hurtful, lewd or malicious. Jesus is literally telling us not to resist, or oppose a person who is offensive to our moral sensibilities. How do we do that without compromising our own moral integrity?

The concept that Jesus seems to be projecting is that we are not to be influenced by evil. We are not to be influenced by an evil person or by the evil deeds of that person. The emphasis is not upon that person and what they do, but it is upon our response.

The way we are salt and light to the world, as Jesus said we were to be, is to be a reflection of who God is. If we are going to talk about a God who is loving, kind and given to mercy and grace, and we project ourselves of being his representatives, then we must also be loving, kind and given to mercy and grace.

How does one turn the other cheek when one is being treated in an unjust manner? That question is the very reason that this passage is listed among the hard sayings of Jesus. The answer is not easy, but in short, Jesus is asking us to do something that cannot be done by the natural man.

Jesus seems to be asking us to do something that can only be done by one who is born of the spirit. We can only respond with kindness to evil men by the Holy Spirit in us.

Prayer: Lord, you have asked me to do something that can only be done by your Spirit. Grant me the grace of your Spirit to do as you ask. Amen.

Message: We are not to resist the evil person but we are to respond to his evil with kindness. Jesus illustrated that idea with the instruction, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Affirmation: It is only by the Holy Spirit in me that I can "turn the other cheek" to one who has offended me. I look at the person, not the offense, with love and grace.

Reflection: Jesus has asked us to do respond to offense in a way that is contrary to our nature. How can we respond in the manner Jesus taught us to respond?

Day Nineteen

Kindness Gives More Than Is Asked

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person…And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

- Matthew 5:38,39,41

If you have ever been involved in a lawsuit you know how destructive it can be. Not only is there usually a financial cost but the cost to emotions and relationships are particularly devastating. Jesus is asking us to give more than is asked for in a lawsuit.

This is a hard saying. The first thing we need to remember about this is that we are being asked to respond with kindness to an evil person. That is, a person whose intent is to cause us harm. Jesus is asking us to not only give him what he asks but to give him more.

What is the core message Jesus is trying to bring out? It is just possible that a person who is unjust to others is just responding to the way he has been treated in the past. You may be his only exposure to kindness. Maybe Jesus is saying that even an evil person can be softened by kindness.

It is quite one thing to be generous with someone who owes us something and it is quite something else to be generous with someone who is trying to extract something from us when we don't feel we owe it. How can we have a generous attitude toward a person who is being unjust to us?

There are a number of issues at play here. First of all, we have the issue of position; what is our position? Then we have the issue of influence; what influence do I want to have with this person?. Then we have the issue of who we are as opposed to who he is.

Our position should be that we are aliens on this earth; we're just passing through so what do things mean to us that we can't take with us anyway? Do I want to show this person my human nature or the Spirit of God? Am I going to allow this person to change me by his evil intent toward me? Something to think about.

Prayer: Father, I really need your help on this one. It is beyond human reason to give more to a hurtful and evil person than he is trying to extract from me. Grant me your grace to return kindness for evil. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: We are demonstrating the grace of God when we respond with kindness to those with hurtful intent toward us. We are to give more than we are asked to give.

Affirmation: I respond to hurtful requests by giving more than I have been asked to give. Then they can see God's grace at work.

Reflection: This devotion considers our position in relation to the person who is attempting to harm us. Reflect upon the position you feel you should take when someone is trying to harm you?

Day Twenty

Kindness Goes The Extra Mile

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person…If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. - Matthew 5:38,39,42

To understand what Jesus is asking his followers to do we must have a little knowledge of the political scene that existed at that time. Jerusalem, Judea and that entire region was ruled by the Roman Empire. Under Roman law a soldier could conscript any civilian to carry his equipment. However, lest a soldier take advantage of a civilian, he was only allowed to require them to carry his equipment for one mile.

You can imagine the resentment a local farmer felt when a soldier would call him from his work in the field to carry the soldier's equipment for a mile. The farmer would probably be seething with anger and cursing the soldier under his breath. That is a natural response, but Jesus asks for a supernatural response.

In this one bit of instruction Jesus is giving us insight into how to treat our enemies. Remember that we are not called to take vengeance, but God has called us to show kindness. Read Paul's good advice from Romans 12:17-21:

> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written:

> "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good..

Relax, enjoy life, go the extra mile and smile, because God is taking care of it. Remember this; it is difficult for a person to remain our enemy when we are constantly showering him with kindness.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to allow you to avenge my adversaries and give me a heart to return kindness for evil. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: Go the extra mile because it is difficult for a person to remain our enemy when we are constantly showering him with kindness.

Affirmation: I must remember that kindness is not a response to the other person - it is the response to what is inside of me. I bless others, even those who are taking advantage of me, because I am kind.

Reflection: Set aside some time and reflect on the passage from Romans quoted in the devotion. How well have you done in overcoming evil with good?

Day Twenty One

Kindness Loans Without Expecting Return

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person…Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. - Matthew 5:38,39,42

This segment of the Sermon on the Mount is dealing with having a giving and forgiving attitude. Jesus is teaching us appropriate responses to an unkind, or evil person. We are taught that it is impossible to avoid hurtful, even malicious people, but we can, by the grace of God, keep from allowing them to change us.

In the examples that Jesus gives there are four areas of challenge. We are challenged in the way we respond to a physical assault, an economic assault, a self esteem assault and a challenge to our compassion. The answer to each of these is the same; be generous to a fault.

I love the way that The Message writes this passage. "Here's another old saying that deserves a second look: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' Is that going to get us anywhere? Here's what I propose: 'Don't hit back at all.' If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, gift wrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously."

One of the points Jesus is making is that we must get out of the rut of doing things the way we have always done them. We can't be ruled by our human nature, we have been given a new nature if we have been born again. The way we respond to others is a reflection of the nature that rules in our heart. The only way we can respond as Jesus calls us to respond is to allow the Holy Spirit to rule in our hearts.

How do you know if the Holy Spirit rules your heart? Just observe how you respond when someone misuses you or asks something of you that requires you to deny your own desires. How generous are you?

Prayer: Lord, I'm working on responding to evil correctly – grant me your grace to submit to your Spirit. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: It is impossible to avoid hurtful, even malicious people, but we can, by the grace of God, keep from allowing them to change us.

Affirmation: I am filled with God's grace and kindness, therefore I will not allow those who are hurtful to me to change who I am. I will return kindness for every unkind deed and I will expect nothing in return.

Reflection: How do we get out of the rut we have been moving in and how do we keep from being ruled by our human nature? Reflect on how we know the Holy Spirit is ruling in our heart.

Day Twenty Two

Be Kindly Affectioned To One Another

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

- Romans 12:9-10

"Love must be sincere." What does that mean? If you truly love you can only do it sincerely, but you can deceive yourself into thinking you love when in fact you are responding to another motivation. You may be motivated by a need for acceptance, or a need to be needed.

We are called to sincerely love one another and to be devoted to one another with *philadelphia (brotherly love)*. Being devoted to one another means that we are going to be considerate of one another and we will be kind. The KJV renders verse 10 this way, "Be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another."

What does brotherly love demand of us? If I love my brother, as Jesus commanded, then I will be considerate of him. My thoughts will not be about how I can use my brother for my advantage but rather my thoughts will be on how I can be a benefit to my brother.

If I love my brother sincerely then I am going to Hate (abhor, utterly detest) what will adversely affect him and I will cling (glue myself to) what is good for

my brother. The Message reads, “Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good.” I don’t know whether that is a direct, word for word, translation, but it does make the point Paul is trying to get across. It is simply this; be kindly affectioned to others.

I have a dear friend named Betty. She has some difficulties that most of us don’t have to face, but she has a trait which all of us should have. Every week she turns in prayer requests for her friends. She calls me about once a week to give an update on her friends and her concern for them. Betty knows how to be kindly affectioned. Do you love sincerely?

Prayer: Lord, I tend to love with a measuring cup and when the cup is full I stop doing deeds of kindness. Grant me the grace to love sincerely. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: If I love my brother, as Jesus commanded, then I will be considerate of him.

Affirmation: I demonstrate my love for my brothers and sisters by showing them my affection and by being considerate of them in every situation.

Reflection: Reflect on this thought from our text, "If I love my brother sincerely then I am going to hate (abhor, utterly detest) what will adversely affect him and I will cling (glue myself to) what is good for my brother."

Day Twenty Three

Be Kind To Your Spouse

Train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled.

– Titus 2:4-6

There is a lot said in this passage about spousal relationships. While it seems that the primary instruction is to the wives, there are also similar instructions for the husbands. The concept is that in the marriage relationship each partner is to have the best interest of the other foremost in their mind.

We could as easily say that young husbands are to love their wives and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy and to be kind. It seems that this shoe fits on both feet, so to speak.

When I first dated my wife we had been to a few restaurants. I am a coffee drinker so I would usually order coffee. About the third time we sat at a restaurant and my coffee came she picked up the creamer and poured in the exact amount of cream I normally put in. She had observed me put the cream in my coffee and she knew exactly how I liked it. That is kindness.

Something else to notice here is that she submitted herself to what she felt would please me. Paul says of wives that they are to, "be subject to their husbands." In another place Paul writes concerning the husbands

and explains how that their first concern should be for the comfort of their wives. He says it this way, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

A wife is asked to submit to the authority of her husband as the one who must give an answer to God, and the husband is asked to submit himself to the needs of his wife and to literally give his life for her if necessary as Christ gave his life for his bride, the church.

Being kind to your spouse produces great rewards and much peace.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for my life partner. Grant me the grace to always be aware of the of my spouse and to answer those needs in kindness. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: In the marriage relationship each partner is to have the best interest of the other foremost in their mind.

Affirmation: I am considerate of my spouse and look for ways that I may be a blessing.

Reflection: It would be good to consider the ways that you could make life more comfortable for your spouse. Observe the little things that please your spouse and see that you practice providing those small blessings.

Day Twenty Four

Be Kind To The Widow And Fatherless

This is what the Lord Almighty says: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other. – Zechariah 7:9-10

The true source of kindness is justice when justice is administered with mercy and compassion. In this chapter the Lord is addressing the concept of religious observance without spiritual renewal. When we do what Christians do just because that's what we're supposed to do we wind up with religion without renewal.

The Lord prompted Zechariah to asks the question, "When you fasted and mourned… was it really for me that you fasted?… Were you not just doing it for yourselves?" (verses 4-6). How often do we perform religious ceremony solely for the purpose of satisfying our need to be religious?

A real test of our religion is whether we administer justice with mercy and compassion. When we practice our faith is it from a sense of legalistic devotion, or is it from a true commitment to the Lord? How we answer that will determine how we look at others.

There are several issues being addressed in this one verse. First there is the issue of kindness. It is easier to be legalistic, requiring every law be followed to the fullest degree, than it is to have compassion and grant mercy for others. Another issue being addressed is

how we treat those we perceive to be weaker than ourselves: The widow, the fatherless and the poor.

Our attitude toward those of less fortune than ourselves is a reflection of the effect our professed faith has had on our own lives. Jesus was addressing the piety of the Pharisees when he said to them, “Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23).

Justice tempered by compassion produces mercy and kindness.

Prayer: Father God, Grant me the grace to accept your blessing knowing that you have blessed me to bless others, especially the very needy. Amen.

Message: A real test of our religion is whether we administer justice with mercy and compassion.

Affirmation: I administer justice tempered with mercy and compassion.

Reflection: It would be good to ask yourself this question, "When I fast, or do works of service, is it really for the Lord or is it to satisfy my own need to be religious?" Also ask, "What is my attitude toward those weaker than myself, the widow, the fatherless and the poor?"

Day Twenty Five

Be Kind To The Needy

He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.
– Proverbs 14:31

I found some interesting commentary on this passage. John Wesley wrote, "His Maker – whose image the poor man bears, by whose providence he is made poor, and who hath declared himself to be their protector and avenger." The Message reads, "You insult your Maker when you exploit the powerless; when you're kind to the poor, you honor God."

Matthew Henry comments, "God is here pleased to interest himself more than one would imagine in the treatment given to the poor. He reckons himself affronted in the injuries that are done them. Whosoever he be that wrongs a poor man, taking advantage against him because he is poor and cannot help himself, let him know that he puts an affront upon his Maker."

Are we getting the point here? When we honor the poor with kindness and compassion, we honor God. When we are unkind to the poor we dishonor God because they are his handiwork just as we are. It is arrogance which drives us to think less of those whose station in life is perceived to be less than ours – and it is self-centeredness to consider ourselves more worthy than they.

It may be true for some that their need is the result of their own behaviors, but that is true of all of us

before God. It was our own behaviors (sin) that drove Christ to the cross. He was certainly not worthy of death because he had known no sin, but all of us have sinned and have come short of God's glory. Rich or poor we are all in the same condition; we are sinners and need a savior.

The same God created us all and the same Christ sacrificed himself for all. There is not a god of the rich and a god of the poor. There is not a Christ for the rich and a Christ for the poor. The Bible says, "He died once for all" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Think about that when you think of people in need.

Prayer: Father, forgive me of arrogance and self-centeredness. Help me to look at others as you look at me. Grant me the grace of kindness. Amen.

Message: You insult your Maker when you exploit the powerless; when you're kind to the poor, you honor God.

Affirmation: I am careful to not exploit the weaknesses of others so that my actions do not reflect badly on my Lord and I make a special effort to be kind to the poor and in so doing I am honoring God.

Reflection: Consider carefully how you have treated those whose station in life is less than your own. Have you thought of yourself as being more deserving of blessing than those less blessed? Think on it.

Day Twenty Six

Be Kind To Fallen Brethren

Brethren, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently… Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ… We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

- Galatians 6:1-2, Romans 15:1

Many years ago I was a jailer in a county jail. There was another jailer there who was a stickler for the rules. He literally carried an inmate rule book around with him. I have caught him hiding around the corner trying to catch inmates in a violation of the rules. Most of us have known someone like that. It seems that they just live for the chance to catch someone in a fault.

We are being encouraged to not be quick to put others on a seat of judgment, but to bear with them, even when they fall. Our goal should be to see the brother or sister restored.

Keep in mind that none of us are above falling and if that should happen to us we would need someone to love us, to care for us and to help us to be restored. I'll never forget the time when I had a sin in my life and took it to a brother that I trusted. Bob was a precious man of God and did not for one minute try to place a judgment on me for my failure. He just loved me and helped me to be restored.

Paul did not write, "If someone is caught in a little sin," he just said "if someone is caught in a sin," and the implication is that if the sin is serious enough that

they are considered fallen, "you who are spiritual should restore him gently."

Kindness to one who has fallen is the spiritual response. Many times I've heard people say, "I know what they have done and I can't handle restoring them." The problem here is that you are thinking about how you are affected rather than what would restore the brother. Paul instructs us "not to please ourselves."

In Proverbs it is written, "He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats a matter separates close friends." You who are spiritual restore those who have fallen.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to look at other believers who have sinned through your eyes of grace and mercy. Amen

Message: If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.

Affirmation: When a brother has fallen I accept the responsibility of continuing to love him and to gently work at restoring him.

Reflection: Too often we are in the seat of judgment rather than the seat of restoration. Reflect upon your own attitude toward those who have a sin in their life. How do you handle them and their sin? Give some thought to how you might gently restore another who has sinned.

Day Twenty Seven

Be Kind To Your Neighbor

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."... If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

– Galatians 5:14, James 2:8

We are being asked to do something that is impossible for us to do in our natural state of being. We are told to love others, even those not related to us, or that we may not even know, as we love ourselves. That is a tall order.

I can easily have a certain level of respect for others, and I can be generous with them, to a point; but to love them as I love myself, that is a very difficult thing. After all, I love my pleasures like food, and fellowship with people I like, how can I have the same desire to see others pleased that I may not even know? Frankly, I can't, and neither can you, but we are being asked to do just that.

How are we going to accomplish this loving our neighbor as ourselves? We can do it by God's grace and kindness that he places in us. When we come to Christ he gives us the Holy Spirit to influence our lives and guide us into his righteous way of living. We can be kind to our neighbors and love them as we love ourselves, because of the grace of God that has been released in us.

What does it mean to love our neighbor as ourselves? Paul gives us a picture of that. In Ephesians

5:25-32 he is talking primarily about the husband-wife relationship, but the principle is the same. Read what Paul writes, and I am substituting "people" for "husband" and "neighbor" for "wife":

> "[People].Love your [neighbor], just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... In this same way, [people] ought to love their [neighbor] as their own bodies. He who loves his [neighbor] loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it."

We can be kind to our neighbor when we love them just as we love ourselves and we can do that only through the grace of God.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for the love and kindness you have shown me. Grant me the grace to love others as you have loved me. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: Love others, even those not related to us, or that we may not even know, as we love ourselves.

Affirmation: Loving others as myself and being kind to my neighbor is made possible by the spirit of God in my. By God's grace and the power of Holy Spirit I love my neighbor as myself.

Reflection: What did you think of the "rewrite" of Ephesians 5:25-32? Reflect on ways that you can apply that passage to your neighbor. You may find that you have to appeal to God to give you grace to fulfill this command.

Day Twenty Eight

Be Kind To The Strangers Among You

When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. – Leviticus 19:33-34

God is reminding Israel of at least two principles in this passage. The first is that all people deserve respect regardless of whether they are of the same race, ethnicity, or national origin as we are. The second is that Israel is to remember how they felt about the way they were treated when they were aliens in a foreign land.

Many of us have not been resident aliens in another country, but most of us have moved into new neighborhoods, or changed jobs where there was a totally different work environment. Those changes were not easy for us and if there was a kind person who reached out to us during those times it made the transition easier.

Many years ago I moved from California to Missouri. Talk about culture shock! We moved out of an environment where there was such a rat race going on that it was difficult to even get to know the next door neighbors. Then we moved to Missouri. I came home one day and there was a man mowing my lawn. As I walked up he said, "Hello neighbor, I just wanted to welcome you to the neighborhood." I felt accepted.

As a national people we are still trying to find our way in the treatment of the alien. We are faced with the issue of illegal aliens and the threat of terrorists coming into our country to wreck havoc. Then there is the tragedy of the attitude toward people of African descent whose ancestors were brought to this country as unwilling slaves. For far too long we not only treated them as unwanted aliens we also abused them in the most horrendous ways.

It is time for believers to be examples to the world around us of how we are to treat the strangers among us. We have not been faithful to our calling until we have loved the stranger, the alien, as ourselves. Think about it.

Prayer: Lord, it doesn't take us long to forget that you reached out to us when we were alone and in need. Help me to love the alien and reach out to them. Amen.

Message: The stranger and foreigner living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were strangers and foreigners.

Affirmation: The Spirit of Christ gives me grace to love strangers and foreigners as myself.

Reflection: Today we are faced with the paradox of the command to love the alien as ourselves and the popular attitude that we should send them home. Think about whether your attitude reflects God's command or the popular opinion.

Day Twenty Nine

God's Kindness Leads Us To Repentance

When you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? – Romans 2:3-4

There is a factor in passing judgment upon another person that most people don't consider. Often it is not about what a person has done, or why they did it. It is often about our attitude concerning that person. We not only want to point out what someone has done wrong, but we want to label them with their sin: They are an adulterer, a thief, a liar, or whatever they have done.

Judging another is not just recognizing that they have sinned, but judging another is mostly about placing a value on the person and condemning them for what they are rather than convicting them for what they have done. That is what distinguishes us from the Lord on this issue.

The purpose of God is to bring people to repentance when they have sinned. That's why when we would call down fire from heaven God covers them with kindness. When we would send them to the gallows he showers them with patience and tolerance. But what's all this talk about them; what about ourselves?

"You didn't think, did you, that just by pointing your finger at others you would distract God from seeing all your misdoings and from coming down on you hard? Or did you think that because he's such a nice God, he'd let you off the hook? Better think this one through from the beginning. God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change" (Romans 2:3-4 in The Message).

When we take our eyes off of the deeds of others and focus on the stuff that is in our own heart then it becomes easier to look at others with kindness. When we can see that it is the kindness of God that has tolerated us and has patiently drawn us to repentance then judging others loses its importance.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to show the same kindness to others that you have shown to me. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: Judging another is mostly about placing a value on the person and condemning them for what they are rather than convicting them for what they have done.

Affirmation: I can realize a person's sin and help him with restoration without placing a judgment, or label, upon him.

Reflection: Read again The Message rendering of this passage. Think about your own attitude about others who have sinned. Has your attitude expressed the same kindness and grace toward them as you expect yourself?

Day Thirty

Kindness Asks You To Become Involved

If you see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it. Help him get it to its feet. - Deuteronomy 22:4

The other day I sat in the parking lot of a department store watching a lady get out of her car and go in the store. She parked in a handicap space and was barely able to get to the back door of the car which she opened and pulled out a wheel chair. I thought, I could have helped her.

I watched as she struggled to open the wheel chair and get seated in it. She then rolled up to the front door and was barely able to get it open so she could get her purse. I almost got out of my car to help her, but it was cold and starting to rain.

It wasn't far from her car to the door of the store and I watched as she pushed on the wheels of her chair to make it up the slight incline to the door. She had to stop a couple of times to rest, and I almost got out of my car to help, but each time she would get started again just as I reached for the door handle.

Finally, she was there at the door. But there was another challenge facing her; she had to manage to get the door open without falling out of her chair or allowing the chair to begin to roll back down to the parking lot. I was reaching for the door handle again when a very nice person from inside the store

came and held the door open to help her get inside.

I was very thankful for that kind lady in the store for helping the wheel chair lady. I would have helped, and I almost did, but another kind person acted before I got around to opening my door.

This is a true story and I have asked God to forgive me for being selfish and inconsiderate of another person in need. Kind deeds left undone leave an emptiness in those who should have been helped and in those who should have helped.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me of my self-centeredness that sometimes keeps me from doing acts of kindness and grant me the grace of being kind to strangers. In Jesus name, amen.

Message: If you see your brother or sister in need of immediate assistance, do not ignore it.

Affirmation: I often pray for eyes to see the needs of others so I can assist them.

Reflection: The story told in devotion text is true, and those were the thoughts I had as I watched this lady in her difficulty. How should I have responded to that situation? Have you had similar instances where you may not have done all that you could have?

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Day Thirty One

Kindness Is A Character Trait

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." Come back to your senses as you ought and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God. I say this to your shame.

– 1 Corinthians 15:33-34

I have noticed the people that I spend time with affect my behavior. There are some people who draw me into a more consecrated life, and there are others who tend to stir worldliness in me. It is important to manage who we allow to have an influence in our lives. Good company inspires us to goodness; bad company inspires us to less than noble purposes.

There are two words translated "good character" in this passage. The first is *chrestos* and means being gracious or kind. The second is *ethos* and means the way we act as in habits or mannerisms.

What Paul seems to be saying is that the company we keep will affect our character. We develop character traits, like kindness and being gracious, by practicing them and continually exposing ourselves to those who will practice them. When we choose to spend time with "bad company" we run the risk of developing character traits that are undesirable.

This month we have looked at kindness from a variety of perspectives. We looked at kindness as a fruit of the Spirit, we looked at the kindness of God, we looked at kindness as being driven by compassion, and we looked at those to whom we are instructed to

be kind. In all of this the goal has been to make kindness to others a primary focus in our life.

I would encourage you to spend time with the Lord asking him to show you ways of being kind to others. We considered the kindness of God and I hope we have concluded that his kindness is what motivates him to continually draw us to himself. That is why we need to spend time with him in prayer and meditating upon his word. Good company inspires us to goodness and God's company is just about as good as it gets.

Prayer: Lord, I want to be kind, but sometimes my self-centeredness gets in the way. Grant me the grace of your kindness being put into my character. Amen.

Message: Good company inspires us to goodness; bad company inspires us to less than noble purposes.

Affirmation: I choose to have fellowship with those who inspire me to goodness and have only casual contact with those who would influence me to less noble purposes.

Reflection: How have these 31 days of exploring ways to express kindness affected you? Reflect on how being in close relationship with God draws you to kindness, then practice being close to God.

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