

## ***Kindness • Galatians 5:22–23***

Our family was eating at a fast food restaurant recently when one of the other customers went up to the counter and demanded to know if his special order Big Mac was ready yet. The McDonald’s employee behind the counter turned around and said, “Oh, yes, it just came up.” He reached over and handed it to the customer who grabbed it out of his hand and said, “Incompetent! You’re all incompetent.” And, then went back to his table. I winced at the wounded expression on the young server’s face as he tried to absorb the customer’s unkindness.

When former President George Bush was inaugurated as the 41st President of the United States, he called for a “kinder, gentler” world. We don’t need to look very far to see a shortage of kindness. Words people say cause pain; actions continually hurt. It seems as if there is a spray of acid ricocheting around in society with all the unkindness that happens, burning holes in people’s lives and sometimes leaving scars that last for a lifetime.

Tolstoy, the famous Russian author of *War and Peace*, was walking down the street one day when a beggar approached him. Tolstoy reached into his pocket for a coin but had none. He said to the beggar, “Please don’t be angry with me, my brother. I have nothing with me. If I did, I would gladly give it to you.”

The beggar said, “You have given me more than I asked for. You have called me ‘brother’.”

In simple terms, Tolstoy was kind.

It is such kindness that is to flavor every Christian in a world that needs to become a kinder and gentler place. Christians are to be

known by “the fruit of the Spirit (which) is love, joy, peace, patience, KINDNESS, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

There are 10,000 examples of kindness. James 1:27 says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.” Isn’t that extraordinary? God describes the kind of religion in which he delights as simple kindness toward those who are in distress.

Except we all know that sometimes it is very difficult to be kind. We are so prone to lash out, to get even, to think first of ourselves.

So how do we become kind? The place to begin is with God and the way he treats us.

I was talking with a graduate school professor about a counseling course he was teaching. He told me about a class exercise where students are asked to tell about a childhood experience with their fathers. Some students tell about playing catch with their dads. Others remember their dad going to a school play or watching a grade school ball game they were in. But, others remember outbursts of

drunken anger or tragic abuse or no father at all.

The professor and I talked for a few more moments about how some of those students have

had their notion of God shaped by their childhood experiences of their fathers.

Let’s take a careful look at what God is really like. God is really kind. There is a fatherly love, a gentle touch, a compassionate concern about him that is extraordinary. Whoever or whatever shaped your image of God,

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let it be correctly shaped by the truth.

Luke 6:35 describes “the Most High (God who) is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.” Imagine that. The Most High God is kind to those who are unappreciative and evil!

Romans 2:4 tells us “that God’s kindness leads (us) toward repentance.” The strategy of God for changing people to be kind to us.

Ephesians 2:6-7 tells us that “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” One of God’s great dreams of forever is to lavish upon us as much kindness as he can.

We are told in Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” God wants us to be kind and forgiving to each other in just the same way God is kind and forgiving toward us.

Imagine with me the father of a large family with lots of children who are less than kind to one another. He would like to change that family, especially in their relationship to Billy, who is the youngest, sort of the runt of the family, who constantly gets picked on. (Those of us who are the youngest in our families understand that in a way that those of you who are older don’t fully appreciate!)

Here’s what the dad decides to do. Since Billy’s birthday is next Friday, he plans to be extra kind to Billy every day. In addition, he buys some very special gifts for Billy.

His plan is to go out of his way to be kind to the other children, as well. He finds ways to get extra money into the hands of each one of the children so they can buy presents for Billy, too.

What do you think of the dad’s plan? Some say he is one super dad! Others say he is one

super naïve dad! Doesn’t he know what the other kids will do? They’ll just keep being rotten to Billy, plus they’ll pocket the extra money for themselves.

And you’re right. Some of those kids will be mean. And some will be kind. But the dad has decided to be kind regardless of how his children respond.

That’s the way God is! In the words of the Bible, he is our “Dad” in heaven. He is kind to us so that we will be kind to others. But, he is kind to us whether we are kind or not. I guess you might say it is up to us.

There is a fascinating aspect to kindness. It’s hard to explain because we don’t use the word kindness in the same way first century Greeks did. When they used the word kindness they often thought in terms of putting on clothes, sort of the idea that you dress up in kindness.

You know those chocolate covered ice cream cones that you get at Dairy Queen? The clerk takes the cone and fills it up with soft ice cream. He then goes to a vat of hot fudge and dips the cone into that thick hot chocolate syrup. What you had to start out with was a very good vanilla cone. But it’s even better now because the flavor has been changed and, at the same time, the appearance has been changed, too, to make a good thing better.

That’s the way it is with kindness in the Christian life. Christians are dipped into the kindness of God until it is all over us and that changes our flavor and our appearance.

Christians are good people. But kindness makes good Christians even better.

Colossians 3:12 tells us, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with . . . kindness.” In other words, we are to be dipped into the kindness of God that changes our flavor and appearance in relationship to everyone around us.

What does this kindness taste like, anyway? Good question! But hard to answer! How do you describe a flavor? I suppose if I had to come up with a word or two to describe lemon, I would say, "Lemon tastes bitter." But, there is a lot more to the taste of lemon than bitterness.

You might say that apples are tart, or raspberry is sweet, or vanilla is smooth. .

To describe the flavor of kindness, I guess I would say it is mellow. Mellow is mild and smooth. It is never too strong or too weak. It's a complement to be described as mellow.

Kindness is sweet. Sweetness is appetizing. It takes that which is otherwise bitter and makes it good. In fact, if you put enough sweetness into it, you can take something that is terribly bitter and you can chase all that bitterness away.

Kindness is pleasant, in the sense of pleasing. We all like people to be kind to us. We like the happiness that comes with kindness, the sense of being important and appreciated.

Kindness is courteous. Courtesy is respect and special consideration for others.

But, words can't adequately describe a flavor. If I say "coffee" or "cinnamon" you can immediately have the taste in your mouth. But if someone has never tasted coffee or cinnamon, no words will ever give them that taste in their mouth. It only comes from personal experience.

The same goes for Christian kindness. Words will never do it. Kindness must be tasted. Taste the kindness of God, and then let other people taste that flavor coming out of you. The opportunities are everywhere. When waiting at a red light and a car wants to get in line ahead of us, we can decide whether to pull up close to the car in front of us or stop and let

that car go ahead. Kindness is doing that for the other person.

At dinnertime, when we get an unwanted telephone call, we have to decide whether or not the words we speak and our attitudes will convey the taste of the kindness of God.

When dealing with a complaining customer, may he taste the kindness of God in us.

Then there is that abrasive family member who has developed the fine art of getting under our skin. Kindness is no less needed, probably it's more needed, in dealing with that person.

Everyday with everyone we have the opportunity to let the flavor of the kindness of God flow through us in what we say and in what we do. In that way we let other people who have never tasted the kindness of Jesus Christ taste him in us.

Here's a homework assignment. It's not real hard, but it's worth doing. Every day, for the next seven days, try being kind just once when otherwise kindness would not be there.

And keep a mental, if not a written, record of that kindness.

Robert De Vincenzo, a professional golfer, was probably as surprised as any-

body else when he won his first professional golf tournament several years back. There on the eighteenth green he was presented with what may have been the largest check he had ever received in his life. Members of the press were there. Pictures were taken.

When he left the clubhouse to go to his car, De Vincenzo met a very sad looking young woman in the parking lot. She said to him, "It's a good day for you, but I have a baby with an incurable disease. It's of the blood, and the doctors say she will die."

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In faltering English he offered to help. He took out a pen and endorsed his winning check over to her and said, “Make some good days for the baby.”

A week later a PGA official walked up to him with the follow-up to that parking lot encounter. He said, “I have some news for you. She’s a phony. There’s no sick baby. She’s not even married. She fleeced you, my friend.”

Robert De Vincenzo looked at that official and said, “You mean there is no baby that is dying without hope?”

The official said, “Right.”

De Vincenzo grinned broadly and said, “That’s the best news I’ve heard all week!”

Here was a man whose life was flavored with kindness!

My friends, let us be like the Most High God who is extraordinarily kind even to the ungrateful and wicked. Let us taste like Jesus.

Let us show kindness.

*Faith Matters* is the Broadcast Ministry of  
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
[www.wooddale.org](http://www.wooddale.org)  
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