

Kindness

6 of 10 in series *Marks of a Flourishing Life*

August 6, 2023

Galatians 5:22-23, etc.

Well, it's good to be back after some time off. I've had a longer-than-usual break from the pulpit this past while, which I've found to be nice. Now that I'm back and rested, you'll once again be hearing from me more often on Sundays.

(Whether or not you think that's a good thing, I don't know...)

But we're continuing our series on the fruit of the Spirit, which the apostle Paul lists in chapter 5 of his letter to the Galatians:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance [or patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.¹

These are marks of a flourishing life. And I remind you that Cornerstone's theme for 2023 has been:

Making space for JOY and FLOURISHING

- In our lives
- In our church
- In our community
- In the world

You see, joy and flourishing are closely related themes in scripture. The latter term—flourishing—is connected with the Old Testament Hebrew word *shalom*, and its New Testament Greek counterpart, *eirene*.

Both terms have to do with the kind of flourishing that happens when people and things exist in a state of *right relationship*.

From a biblical point of view, flourishing is about the world as God intends it to be— about life as God intends it to be. And God is indeed at work in Jesus to ultimately make his creation a place where everyone and everything flourishes together in perfect, *interrelated* harmony.

¹ Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)

As followers of Jesus, we can experience this flourishing even now, albeit in part, and at the same time we are called to be God's agents to help others flourish as much as possible—even as we await the day of Jesus' return, when everyone and everything will finally, fully and forever flourish under God's benevolent rule and reign.

The Holy Spirit is at work in us as followers of Jesus even now, to help us flourish relationally. As we make space for Jesus, his Spirit cultivates in us and through us the highly relational fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

In this series, we've been looking at each fruit one at a time, and today, we're going to focus on *kindness*.

Let's begin by harkening back to the subject of last week's message—patience. Now, to say that we live in an impatient world is to state the obvious.

For example, recently a study was done of 6.7 million users of movie streaming services. How long do you think the average user is willing to wait for a movie to start streaming?

The answer? Two seconds. Two seconds, and the movie had to be playing, otherwise, see you later. The study showed that if it took just 5 seconds for the video to start, 25% of the viewing audience would drop off. 10 seconds, and you'd lose half your audience.

Speaking of video technology, some of you of a certain *vintage* will remember the days when you could rent a DVD and they would mail it to your house. That's actually how Netflix got started. Netflix was a video delivery service before it became a streaming platform. And at the time, people thought this was great, because you didn't have to make a trip to Blockbuster anymore to rent movies!

Surely some of you who are younger are listening to this and wondering, "What's Blockbuster?" Some of you may even be wondering, "What's a DVD?" *Google it.*

But if you go a just little bit further back into the history of video tech, you'll learn about these—VHS tapes. Kids, this is what videos looked like back in the 1980's and 90's. So here we have a real artifact—a relic of ancient history. What you'd do is insert one of these into a machine called a VCR, and play your video.

Those of you who were around back in the olden days should be able to answer the following question. Video rental stores would often put a little sticker on these tapes with three words of instruction on it. What were those three words?

Be kind. Rewind.

Because that way, the tape would be all queued up and ready for the next person to watch.

And the thing was, you actually felt good pretty about rewinding, like you were a responsible member of society, a rather decent human being!

I think we can all agree, though— there's a lot more to kindness than rewinding.

Some years ago, a kindness movement swept the land, sounding the call for people to practice so-called random acts of kindness.

Let's say, for example, that you're lined up in the Tim Horton's drive-thru. You place your order. You pull up to the window, with your debit card out, ready to tap, but the cashier hands you your order and says that the person in line ahead of you has already paid for it.

You've just become the recipient of a random act of kindness. Have you ever had a similar experience?

An author named Gavin Whittsett wrote a book on the random acts of kindness movement. He explains that the whole point of the movement is to wake people up to the kind impulses we all have, and to remember that it feels good to act on those impulses.

But in scripture, the apostle Paul would tell us that when it comes to authentic biblical kindness, our primary motivation should not be to feel better about ourselves. Nor should our motivation be to receive recognition, acknowledgement, appreciation or the expectation of anything in return for our kindness.

What does Paul actually mean, then, when he tells us in Galatians 5 that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is kindness?

For the rest of the message, we're going to explore **what biblical kindness means** as well as **how to grow in it**. Along the way, I'll tell you about a couple of special opportunities for you to practice kindness, and will also give an opportunity, for those who need it, to personally say yes to God's ultimate gift of kindness—Jesus Christ.

First, let's explore:

1. **What biblical kindness means.**

It certainly means a lot more than “be kind, rewind” or even random acts of kindness.

In the Bible, virtues like kindness are most often displayed through stories. One powerful example of biblical kindness is found in the Old Testament story of David and Mephibosheth. Everybody say, *Mephibosheth*.

In 1 Samuel, we read about the deep friendship between David and Jonathan. The two make a covenant, a promise, to care for each other’s families should either of them ever die.²

Tragically, Jonathan and his father, King Saul, end up getting killed in battle. David, who has now become king, remembers his covenant with Jonathan and asks:

“Is anyone still alive from Saul’s family? If so, I want to show God’s kindness to them.”³

David learns that Jonathan has a son with a physical disability named Mephibosheth, who is still alive, with no one to look after him. So he finds Mephibosheth and this is what he tells him:

“Don’t be afraid!” David said. “I intend to show kindness to you because of my promise to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the property that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will eat here with me at the king’s table!”⁴

David refers to this act of covenant love as showing *kindness*. The Old Testament Hebrew word for it is *hesed*, which is usually translated lovingkindness, or mercy. David shows *hesed* to his deceased friend’s son.

Such lovingkindness is a reflection of how God himself treats his people. Lots of Old Testament verses speak of God’s *hesed* toward us. For example, Psalm 117 says:

For His merciful kindness is great toward us... Praise the Lord!⁵

Jumping forward, in the New Testament biblical kindness is seen as the practical, tangible manifestation of Christ-like love. “Love is kind,” declares Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, which is helpfully paraphrased in *The Message* version of the Bible as follows:

² See 1 Samuel 20

³ 2 Samuel 9:3 (NLT)

⁴ 2 Samuel 9:7 (NLT)

⁵ Psalm 117:2 (NIV)

Love cares for others more than itself. ⁶

To be clear, that doesn't mean you should never consider what's good for you. Enabling someone else to mistreat or walk all over you isn't kind at all— neither to you nor to the other person.

That said, biblical kindness is driven by a deep desire for the well-being of others. You might say that **kindness is going out of your way to help others without thought of what's in it for you.**

That's what David did for Mephibosheth. In God's name, he went out of his way to help someone in need without thought for himself. In doing so, he showed the kindness of God.

Of course, it's easy— all too common—to act kindly toward others when there's something in it for you.

One of my children—I won't say which one of the three—but back in the day, sometimes what *she* [wink] would do is come up to me and start telling me how very much she loves me:

I love you sooooo much, Dad! You're the best dad in the world!

And when that happened, I would of course respond by saying (parents, say it with me):

What do you want?

Or, *how much* do you want?

Her strategy to butter me up was smart—because it often worked—but you can't really call it kind. Why? Because there was something in it for her.

Biblical kindness, on the other hand, is going out of your way to benefit others without thought of what's in it for you. It's being helpful to those who need help, no strings attached.

Furthermore, biblical kindness is super practical. It involves looking for tangible, everyday opportunities to do good to others, to help them according to their need.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:4 (MSG)

It's about seeing need, and actively responding to it— emphasis on the word *actively*. Again, we saw this in David's example. He saw Mephibosheth's need, and then actively responded to it, at cost to himself. That's kindness.

You see, you're not kind simply because you refrain from doing unkind things. True kindness goes out of its way—quietly and without fanfare—to engage not in random but rather *intentional* acts of kindness.

You can pretty much think of kindness as love in action. **Kindness is love in action.**

New Testament scholar Gordon Fee tells us that in 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul sees patience (which Pastor Andrew talked about last week) and kindness as two sides of the same coin.⁷ Both are expressions of Jesus-like *agape* love.

Patience is largely about what we *refrain* from doing. We must be slow to speak and slow become angry, as the Bible says.⁸

Kindness, on the other hand, is *action-oriented*. It can be manifest in hundreds of different ways, but at the end of the day, biblical kindness is something you *do*. It's love in action.

In the early centuries of the church, people would sometimes get mixed up about what to call Christians. You see, the Greek word for Christ (*christos*) was really close to the Greek word for kind (*chrestos*). And because followers of Jesus were so well-known for their acts of kindness, some folks mistakenly, yet fittingly, referred to Jesus' early followers not as "Christians" but as "the kind ones."⁹

Are Christians today—people like you and me—likely to be identified as "the kind ones" by those around us? Because that should be the case, more and more, both in our personal lives and as a church family.

As a pastor, I thank God to be able to say that overall, we see a lot of kindness happening in and through the people of Cornerstone. A lot of love in action, praise God. Of course, there's always room to grow, both corporately and personally, right?

So let's talk now about how we can become kinder people. Let's talk about:

⁷ See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 636.s

⁸ James 1:19-20

⁹ Philip D. Kenneson, *Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*, p. 137.

2. How to grow in biblical kindness.

One New Testament scholar explains that:

Kindness, at its most basic level, involves the giving and receiving of help.¹⁰

Therefore, if we want to grow in kindness, one of the most basic requirements is to **be willing to give and receive help.**

Now this is much easier said than done. Why? Because we live in a society that promotes self-sufficiency. From an early age, we're told that self-reliance, independence, and autonomy are among the highest virtues.

We've come to believe that to ask for help is more or less to admit that we've somehow failed.

Many of us have been socialized to believe that it's bad form to ask for or accept help from anyone else. Even my dad, who's 96, acknowledges that he still find it painfully difficult to ask for help, even with the needs he has at this late stage of his life.

Have you ever considered that by being willing to ask for and receive help when you need it, you're actually offering others a gift? You're giving someone else the opportunity to grow in kindness by helping you. When you're not willing to share your need and receive help, you deprive others of that opportunity.

And even though most of us are much more comfortable with the idea of giving help than receiving it, at times we may still hesitate to give help to others because we fear that we may offend them with our offer of help.

But true kindness doesn't get bogged down in that kind of thinking: *What will others think of me if I offer to help them? What will others think of me if I ask for and accept help?* Those questions are self-focused, whereas true biblical kindness is self-forgetful.

And the Bible's teaching on kindness points to the fact that we need each other. Although we live in a society that makes a virtue of independence and self-sufficiency, in 1 Corinthians Paul likens the church of Jesus Christ to one body with many parts, where:

¹⁰ Ibid, 137.

The eye can never say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” The head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you.” In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary...

This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it. ¹¹

As the great British poet John Donne once wrote, “No man [or woman] is an island.” Give yourself and others the chance to grow in kindness by being willing to both give and receive help graciously.

When it comes to practicing kindness, just start right where you are. Who are people in your household or family that you can show kindness to according to their needs? Who are the people in your neighbourhood, who are the friends and co-workers that you can show kindness to— love in action— in some practical way?

Cornerstone actually has a couple of great opportunities for you to practice kindness right now. Let me tell you about them:

Backpack Drive: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/backpackdrive

With back-to-school quickly approaching, you can join us in supporting local students in need by filling a backpack with all of the right supplies to help them start off the school year! Through our Food Pantry and local partnerships with Greensborough P.S. and other projects, these backpacks will be handed out directly to those who need them. For all the info you need about how to fill a backpack, visit the link you see on the screen. All donations can be dropped off in the bin by the office doors until next Sunday, August 13th.

Food Pantry: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/foodpantry

The Cornerstone Pantry strives to serve the Markham Stouffville community by providing food boxes to families experiencing food insecurity. The number of pantry clients we serve has been on the rise, given the rising cost of living, including very high food prices (as you know). These things, along with job losses or job changes over the pandemic have left many families in vicarious financial situations. Our community also has many families that are new to Canada, including refugees.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 12:21-22, 25-27 (NLT)

While the government provides some support, it's often not enough to get by. When we help them with food, it frees up their funds to be applied to other expenses.

Our pantry team makes space to listen to the stories of our clients, and customizes their care/provisions as a practical means of offering love and hope. You can support the work of the Pantry by dropping off non-perishable food items in the black bin in the elevator foyer by the church office and in the Cafe. Note: Please check expiry dates when donating items, and you can find a list of recommended items to donate on our pantry web page.

So, are you ready to take action and show some kindness to our neighbours?

What if we put together so many backpacks that every student who needed one could get one, with leftovers for needs that might come up later in the year?

What if our pantry bins and shelves were filled to overflowing?

I think you are willing, but the key is follow-through. Kindness is intentional. So we're going to pause now, so you can set a reminder on your phone so you won't forget to fill and donate a backpack or contribute to our Food Pantry...

When these gifts are given to those who need them, may Cornerstone become known, as the early Christians were, as the kind ones! And if people should ask why we're so kind, we will point them to the one who is the ultimate embodiment of all kindness— Jesus .

You see, most fundamentally, your growth in kindness will be cultivated the most when you **keep your focus on Ultimate Kindness—Jesus**. We grow in kindness when we focus on the unfathomable kindness God has shown us by giving his Son Jesus to die on the cross to save us from sin and death. As the Bible says in Titus:

Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other.

But when God our Savior revealed his **kindness and love**, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. ¹²

¹² Titus 3:4-7 (NLT)

We've seen today that biblical kindness is a reflection of God's kindness. It cares for others more than self. It goes out of its way to benefit others. It sees another's need, and actively responds to it, at cost to itself.

God saw us in great need—we were lost in our sin—and in Jesus, he actively responded to our need at infinite cost to himself.

God went out of his way—an infinite distance—from the universe's most high and exalted throne, to Bethlehem's humble manger, to a rugged cross on a hill outside Jerusalem—to rescue us.

God cared more for us than he cared for himself, because in Jesus, he gave his everything for us, that we might be saved. This is God's Ultimate Kindness to us in Jesus: Through his shed blood, our sins are washed away, his Spirit makes us new, and the confidence of eternal life becomes ours.

And we grow the most in kindness toward others when we keep our focus on the Ultimate Kindness God has shown to us in Jesus. God's kindness to us in Christ will never be exhausted—it will never run out or come to an end. So we can be free to go and show others the same kindness that we have received—the very kindness of God himself. We will grow in kindness as we stay focused on Jesus, because he is God's Ultimate Kindness to you and to me.

And I wonder if there's anyone here today who is not yet a follower of Jesus. You've not yet said yes to God's gift of kindness that he's made available to you in Jesus. You've not yet said yes to God's invitation to wash away your sins and to give you new birth and a new life through the Holy Spirit. Maybe you hadn't even been aware of this invitation from God, but now you are, and I'd like to give you a chance to respond to that invitation.

I'd like to ask everyone to bow their head and close their eyes at this time.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus—whether you're here in person or are with us online—and would like to say yes to God's invitation to you in Jesus to wash away your sins, and to give you spiritual rebirth and a new life as a follower of Jesus— I invite you to simply raise your hand as a way of saying yes to Jesus. If you're here in person, just slip it up until I see it, and then you can take it back down. I'm not going to single you out or embarrass you in any way. Just slip it up so I can see it, and take it back down.

If you're online, I can't see you raising your hand, of course, but Jesus can, and that's what matters most. So if you're with us online, raise your hand as well: "I say yes to you now, Lord Jesus. I invite you into my life to be my Saviour and Lord."

Any other hands?

Okay, if you just put your hand up, I'd like to lead you in a short prayer to give your life to Jesus, and I'll ask the whole congregation to pray along with you. Would you all repeat this prayer after me please, phrase by phrase?

Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and that in God's ultimate act of kindness, you left the glories of heaven, and were born here on earth, as one of us, to give your life for us, to rescue us from sin and death, and restore us to God. Wash away my sins, and give new birth and a new life in you. I ask you to take your rightful place in my life, as my Saviour and Lord. Reign in me, transform me to become like you, and help me to grow, in my relationship with you each day. And make me kind, like you. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen!

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If you just raised your hand and prayed to say yes to Jesus, I want to encourage you to reach out to me by email, and let me know of your decision today. My email address is there on the screen, and you can also find it on the church website. I'd love be to able to connect with you and get you set up with some helpful next steps for your new journey of following Jesus.