

## Love is Kind

3 of 11 in series *Love Is*

May 3, 2020

1 Cor. 13:4a

Hi everyone. Today we continue in our series *Love Is*, where we're unpacking the Bible's famous "love chapter"— 1 Corinthians 13— verse-by-verse, phrase-by-phrase.

As usual, we'd love it if you could send us a photo of your handwritten notes from today's message.

So far, in exploring 1 Corinthians 13, we've seen that **life minus love equals zero**. In life and in ministry, we can do the good thing, the inspiring thing, the sacrificial thing— even the supernatural thing— but if we're not doing it in love— if we're not doing it in a spirit of Jesus-like *agape* that lays down its life for the sake of others—then it all amounts to a whole lot of nothing.

If we don't get love right, there's nothing else worth getting right.

1 Corinthians 13 teaches that the ultimate criteria for assessing how we're doing as a church, and how you're doing personally as a follower of Jesus, is love.

As disciples of Jesus, the very heart of our calling is to let the *agape* love of Jesus fill us, transform us, and then flow through us to bless God and others.

This is why the priority of love is reflected in Cornerstone's Mission Statement:

*Making space for Jesus to shape people together in God's love.*

More and more, we want to become a congregation of radical lovers of God, of each other, and of our neighbours both locally and around the world.

But what does it *mean* to be shaped in God's love? What does *agape* love actually look like when it's lived out?

In verses 4-7 of our passage (1 Corinthians 13:4-7), Paul gives us a list of signs to look for in order to assess the degree to which we're walking in love. Essentially, he breaks down what love *is*, as well as what love *is not*.

Last Sunday we looked at Paul's first "love is" statement: *Love is patient*.

Today, we'll explore the second: *Love is kind*.

Now I began last week's message by talking about how advances in technology have fed our collective impatience. Whereas people used to think it was super convenient to be able to rent a DVD and have it mailed to their house, now we get impatient when the movie we want to watch takes any more than 2 seconds to start streaming.

I'd like to launch into today's topic—*kindness*—by going even further back into the history of video tech. I did a little archaeological dig in my house and found this— an old VHS tape. A real relic of ancient history. Kids, this is what videos looked like back in the 1980's and 90's. You'd have to insert this into a machine, and play your video.

Those of you who were around back in that era should be able to answer the following question. Video rental stores would often put a little sticker on these tapes that had three words of instruction on it. My question to you is this: What were those three words?

I know a lot of you have it already. If you're of a certain age, that is.

*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 yourself for rewinding!

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

In recent years, a kindness movement has been sweeping 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 Whitsett 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 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 1 Corinthians 13 that love is kind?

For the rest of this 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 some special opportunities for you to practice kindness. And finally, we'll celebrate God's unspeakable kindness to us in Jesus by sharing the Lord's Supper together.

First, let's explore:

## 1. What biblical kindness means.

It certainly means a lot more than *be kind, rewind* or 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 at home 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 (see 1 Samuel 20).

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."<sup>1</sup>

David learns that Jonathan has a disabled son, Mephibosheth, who is still alive, with no one to look after him. So David 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!"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 9:3 (NLT)

<sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 9:7 (NLT)

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 dead friend's son.

Such lovingkindness is a reflection of how God himself treats his people. Dozens 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!<sup>3</sup>

Jumping forward, biblical kindness is seen in the New Testament as the 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:

Love cares for others more than itself.<sup>4</sup>

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 define it as **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.

I have a child—I won't say which one of the three—but sometimes what *she* does [wink] is come up to me and start telling me how very much she loves me: *I love you sooooo much, Daddy. You're the best dad in the world!* And when that happens, I of course respond by saying (parents, say it with me):

What do you want?

Or, *how much do you want*, as the case may be.

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 117:2 (NKJV)

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4b (MSG)

Her strategy to butter me up is *smart*—because it often works—but you can't really call it *kind*. Why? Because there's 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.

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 we talked about last week) and kindness as two sides of the same coin.<sup>5</sup> Both are expressions of Jesus-like *agape* love.

Patience is about what we refrain from doing. We are slow to become angry.

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."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 636.

<sup>6</sup> Philip D. Kenneson, *Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*, p. 137.

Are Christians today—people like you and me—likely to be identified as “the kind ones” by those around us? Because if we’re growing in *agape* love, that should be the case, more and more, both in our personal lives as well as our life together as a church family.

As a pastor, I thank God to be able to say that 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:

## **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.<sup>7</sup>

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 93, acknowledges that he still find it painfully difficult to ask for help, even though he’s at a point in his life when he especially needs it.

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 them to opportunity to grow in kindness, in love, by helping you. When you’re not willing to share your need, 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.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

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:

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.<sup>8</sup>

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, everyday way?

As well, Cornerstone can connect you with some great opportunities to practice kindness. Just go to our COVID response webpage ([cornerstonechurch.ca/COVID](https://cornerstonechurch.ca/COVID)), and click on either the I Need Help button, or the I Can Help button. Because remember, growth in biblical kindness involves willingness to give as well as to receive help.

On the page, you'll find lots of options in both areas. Respond to any of those as the Holy Spirit leads you. Today, I'd like to highlight 3 opportunities in particular:

**Making sandwiches for the homeless**, right in your own kitchen. Cornerstone is partnering with City Street Outreach [see logo below if useful], a Markham-Stouffville based ministry that does weekly food, sleeping bag, and clothing runs to the homeless in downtown Toronto. Find all of the details—including sign-up info,

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:21-22, 25-27 (NLT)

safety protocols, and pick-up or drop-off options—at the web address you see on the screen ([cornerstonechurch.ca/COVID#help](http://cornerstonechurch.ca/COVID#help)).

On the same page, you'll also find information about how you can provide:

**Handwritten notes for Cornerstone's neighbours.** Join this initiative by making notes of encouragement which will be shared with our neighbours that live closest to Cornerstone Centre. We want them to know that we're thinking of and praying for them at this time. We're aiming to reach about 100 households in this way. With each handwritten note, we're going to add a \$5 gift card to Wayne's Cup [see logo below], an amazing local coffee shop that employs people with special needs. So in the process, we'll be showing kindness not only to Cornerstone's neighbours, but also to a very worthy local small business.

Thirdly, you can make:

**Handwritten notes for frontline workers.** Your encouraging notes will be delivered to local frontline workplaces along with some snacks. So these notes will go to hospital staff, paramedics, long-term care home workers, and so on.

It's just a small act of kindness to let these heroes know that we appreciate all they do and that they're in our prayers. Our notes might be just the pick-me-up a tired frontline worker needs at the end of another challenging day.

As with the other opportunities I mentioned, all the details for this can be found at this web page ([cornerstonechurch.ca/COVID#help](http://cornerstonechurch.ca/COVID#help)).

So to grow in kindness, be willing to give and receive help.

Even more fundamentally, our growth in kindness is fostered by focusing on the Ultimate Kindness ever shown (**Focus on the Ultimate Kindness**)—the 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. <sup>9</sup>

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.

Jesus is God's Ultimate Kindness to you and to me. And at this time, we celebrate his kindness to us in Lord's Supper. Hopefully, you have your communion elements all ready to go at home.

And now, we remember that at his last meal with his friends before he died Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and shared it, saying:

This is my body, broken for you. Eat it and remember me.

After they had eaten, he took wine, blessed it and shared it, saying:  
This is my blood, shed for you. Drink it and remember me.

And so we eat and drink, and we remember:  
the Ultimate Kindness of God in giving us Jesus  
and the kindness of Jesus' sacrifice for us which makes us whole. Amen.

Let's take a moment now to eat and drink together...

And now would you bow with me for a word of prayer?

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God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: Nourish us this day with Jesus, your Ultimate Kindness, that we may become agents of your kindness and love to each other, to our families, our neighbours, our co-workers, our community, and the world. In us and through us, may your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray. And all God's people said, amen.