

July 4, 2021

What Kinds of Kindness Are You Bearing?

Galatians 5:22-23

Reverend Yong Choel Woo

Last Sunday evening, I received an email from JJ Rowell that Curt Timmons, the father of Ken Matthews, who had come to church to see his granddaughter sing during the worship service, had a positive impression of our church and left a message on the Facebook homepage of our church. (slide 1) It reads, "This church is awesome. I went today for the first time to see my granddaughter sing. My son and daughter-in-law go there. Pastor Woo and everyone was so welcoming and friendly. I finally found a church to go to up here. In other churches the people looked at me like I didn't belong there and were cold, and I didn't feel welcome. But this church was great, and all the parishioners were friendly and welcoming as well."

What do you think made him feel that way regarding our church? I guarantee you that it was our kindness toward him that made him feel welcome here, whether or not we were conscious of it. If we have a kind of kindness in our hearts, minds, attitudes, and faith, it makes us do positive things for others, like approaching a newcomer and saying hello to them. (slide 2) It is a small and simple gesture that can mean a lot to a newcomer or a visitor who feels uncertain when they come here for the first time.

Curt's message is very encouraging for us, and reminds us how vital our kindness is in our relationships, ministries, and faith community. When we show our kindness to others, even though we don't expect any reward, it indeed pays dividends back to us. I am so proud of all of you and pray that we continue to be kind to one another and experience the many changes our kindness will make in our lives.

This morning, I would like all of us to think about the spiritual fruit of kindness that we are to bear in our lives with the help of the Holy Spirit. (slide 3) What kinds of kindness did Paul have in mind in today's scripture? What are the characteristics of kindness and what challenges do we face as we live out the fruit of kindness?

First of all, we all need to remember that God wants us to bear the spiritual fruit of kindness, which is part of His character, with the help of the Holy Spirit. We should regard kindness as one of the divine and godly characteristics, which should also become the character of His people. Though we still fall short of bearing the fruit of kindness, we can go forward to make that happen with the help of the Holy Spirit.

So, let's first closely examine what kindness is really like. (slide 4) Kindness comes from the Greek word, χρηστότης (Krestes) and its adjective, krestos means to be 'useful, profitable or well-fit for what is really needed.' Krestoes (kindness) means to know what others need and meet those needs.

My first name is Yong Choel. Each word has its own meaning. (slide 5) Yong means "useful," and Choel means "enlightening." When they are put together, Yong Choel means to become a useful being for others(the world) and do enlightening things for others(the world). Though I am not sure my parents intentionally chose that name for me, knowing that I would become a pastor, I think my name is a good fit for a pastor and in a sense I am born to be a kind pastor.

(slide 6)Kindness has its original meaning of doing some useful things for others.

Relating this original meaning of kindness to God's character, let's examine how God's kindness was shown to His people throughout biblical history. In the Old Testament, (slide 7) the best word for kindness is hesed (חֶסֶד), which has many meanings like grace, mercy, steadfast love, goodness, or kindness.

In Psalm 23:6 we read: (slide 8) "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Here, hesed is translated into goodness in English, describing what God the Shepherd had done for His sheep, David, and the Israelites.

In Isaiah 63:7, we can get a glimpse of how the word hesed(kindness) is acted out by God. It reads, (slide 9)"I will tell of the kindness of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us. Yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses." We can see that kindness meant what God had done for His people, that is, goodness, regardless of their sins and disobedience.

In Ruth, we can confirm that Ruth and Naomi showed their kindness(hesed)to one another. Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, (slide 10) "May the Lord show you kindness(hesed) as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me." (Ruth 1:8) . Boaz and Ruth also showed kindness to one another. Naomi said to Ruth, (slide 11)"He(Boaz) has not stopped showing his kindness(hesed) to the living and the dead." (Ruth 2:20) Boaz replied, (slide 12)" The Lord bless you, my daughter, This kindness(hesed) is greater than that which you showed earlier." (Ruth3:10) In Ruth, we can see that kindness(hesed) meant doing good for others with caring and sacrificial love.

In the New Testament in Acts 14:17, Paul defines kindness as God's grace. (slide 13)"He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

In Romans 2:4, Paul relates kindness to God's endurance of the many sins of His people.(slide 14) "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?"

In Titus 3:4-5, Paul relates kindness to our salvation through Jesus Christ. (slide 15)"At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. ...But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

(slide 16)The culmination of God's kindness for his people is Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to redeem their sins and embraced them as His people, regardless of the law, ethnicity, gender, social status, class, or many other factors.

As we consider all of these scriptures related to kindness, we gain a better understanding of what God's kindness and its many characteristics were like. And we can gain a better understanding of what kinds of fruit of kindness we should bear in our lives as God's children.

All the scriptures bear witness that God knew what His people needed to live their lives as His children and provided for their physical and spiritual needs, not expecting any reward in return. Even when they turned away from Him and worshipped other gods, God did not punish them for their sins by ending their lives. Instead, He has been faithful in forgiving them and making them live a new life for their sake. Knowing how disobedient His people had been to Him and embracing their vulnerabilities, His deep compassion and heartfelt love for them was greater than all their sins against Him. He stood ready to provide all necessary things for their lives, including their political freedom, land, property, the law, and even His own son, Jesus Christ. Throughout history, (slide 17) God has shown His people His character of kindness, which consists of His compassion and sacrificial love.

God's example challenges us to bear the fruit of His kindness in our lives. We should go beyond just being nice to others. Our kindness should not be regarded as just a technique to build a good relationship with other people. Rather, our kindness should be part of our unique divine character, embedded in our lives through our thoughts, behaviors, and relationships, with the help of the Holy Spirit. We can't bear the fruit of kindness full of compassion and sacrificial love on our own. But we can with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit will work on our hearts and minds to serve people, we will bear kindness, the fruit of divine character, and that will make a difference in our lives.

Let's look within ourselves. Let's examine our relationships with those around us. Are we bearing the fruit of kindness in our relationships? If not, what is preventing us from doing that?

(slide 18) There seems to be two kinds of relationships that we form with others. One is a superficial or shallow relationship. The other is a deep, profound relationship. If we conclude that a certain person that we meet is either not our type or that knowing them is not beneficial to us, we are apt to form a superficial relationship with them. However, if we instead focus on how we can be meaningful or useful to them or help them meet their needs, we can show our kindness to them and form a close, in-depth relationship with them.

(slide 19) How do we approach making a relationship with others? Do we focus more on ourselves, or on others?

God wants us to bear the fruit of kindness in our relationships with those around us especially our family, our neighbors, and our church family. This means we are supposed to focus more on others, not on ourselves. Yes, it is not easy to bear the fruit of kindness in our relationships with others on our own, because we are so accustomed to forming our relationships with others focusing on our personal standards, preferences, and tastes, and not focusing on others.

However, with the Holy Spirit's help, we are able to bear the fruit of kindness accompanied by compassion and sacrificial love in our relationships with others in four important ways:

(slide 20) -The Holy Spirit makes us realize what the fruit of kindness is like and how important it is in our relationships and lives.

(slide 21)-The Holy Spirit makes us realize God wants us to show kindness to those around us, including our family, friends, church family members, neighbors, and even strangers.

(slide 22) -The Holy Spirit makes us realize that we should first do something useful for others.

(slide 23) -The Holy Spirit makes us look at those around us as God's children regardless of their social and economic status, education, lifestyle, and many different life factors.

A few days ago, Dave Stockford shared a beautiful analogy that he had heard from a radio announcer on a local Christian radio station. It is such a good analogy through which we can think about how valuable we are in God's eyes. Just imagine that a person has two 20-dollar bills in his hand. One is worn-out, crumpled, and torn, while the other is a crisp, wrinkle-free, newly printed bill. Between them, there is a clear difference in their appearance. Which bill has greater value? Both bills have the same value regardless of their physical appearance. The radio announcer used this analogy to describe how God sees us. Though we are different in many ways like our appearance, skin color, ethnic background, education, wealth, political views, morals, or physical and mental vulnerabilities, we are all valued equally as God's precious children. We must look at those around us in the same way that God does. We should see that all of God's children are of equal value in our eyes.

(slide 24) The starting point of all our efforts to bearing the fruit of kindness should be this: we should look at one another as being precious and valuable. If we do that, it will be very easy for us to show our kindness to others in need by doing everything we can for everyone we encounter in life.

Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will work through us to look at those around us in the same way God does and to show them our kindness accompanied by compassion and heartfelt love. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to those who are different from us in many ways and who are vulnerable with many issues in life. Let's pray we can practice compassion and sacrificial love to those around us and bear the fruit of kindness.