



Date: May 18-19, 2019
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Scripture: Kindness

Its origins aren't 100% clear but some believe that it was sparked in a restaurant in Sausalito, California in 1982 when Anne Herbert scrawled the words, *practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty* on a place mat. Herbert's gesture was in response to the common "news speak" of the day that labeled the increasing incidences of lawlessness as *random acts of violence and senseless acts of cruelty*. Herbert flipped it around to advocate for goodness to prevail in the midst of an uncertain time. The phrase, *random acts of kindness* or RAK's caught on quietly at first. It spread to bumper stickers but it prompted a social movement even before the days of the internet, twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

"Random Act of Kindness, True stories of Acts of Kindness", was published in February 1993 and set off a chain reaction. Articles appeared in nearly every newspaper across Canada and the US. Hundreds of radio stations devoted airtime to the cause. In 1993, Dr. Chuck Wall, then a professor at a College in California, heard of yet another news report about a *random act of senseless violence*. He decided that these negative actions might be countered by focusing on activity that was just the opposite.

So, he gave his students the assignment to go out and commit one random act of senseless kindness, write about it and analyze their experience and the experience of the recipient of this kindness. The students' reactions were overwhelmingly positive. What started as a single website in 1993 has taken on a life of its own and become an international movement and resulted in the founding of a non-profit organization, *Kindness, Inc*, staffed completely by volunteers. Dr. Wall has received international acclaim for his creation of the *random act of kindness* movement. This has led to a special

day set aside every year, February 17, where people everywhere are encouraged to participate in acts of kindness for others.

Now, this is not to be confused with *Pay it Forward* day which this year was held on Sunday April 28th. Maybe you saw the movie, *Pay It Forward* that was released in the year 2000.

It tells the story of Trevor, who is a seventh grade social studies teacher, gives his class an assignment to devise and put into action a plan that will change the world for the better. Trevor comes up with the idea of *pay it forward*, which means the recipient of a gesture of goodwill or kindness does a favour for three other people. Instead of paying the favour back, you pay it forward. You do a good deed for three other people and they each do a favour for three people and so on until kindness is spreading all over. Today, over 80 countries participant in **Pay It Forward Day**. This is their mandate.

Pay It Forward Day exists to make a difference by creating a huge ripple of kindness felt across the world. Of course, our hope is that people pay kindness forward every day and make each day that little bit brighter.

We believe that small acts, when multiplied by millions of people can literally change the world for the better. This year, PIFD was aiming to inspire over 10 million acts of kindness world-wide.

With all of this time and energy being devoted to stimulate acts of Kindness and goodwill worldwide, you would think that we live in one of the joyous times in history wouldn't you? But just the opposite seems to be true.

It seems as though we are becoming more angry and hateful. If you don't believe me, scan through the social feeds of various topics online. It doesn't take long before the name calling and worse begin to infiltrate the comments section.

I read an article on climate change in an online newspaper on Thursday. By noon, it had 49 online comments about the article. A few of the comments were knowledgeable and enlightening but the vast majority were derogatory towards the government and some were just plain vulgar. I have stopped following some people I used to follow online because they just seem to be so negative.

So what has happened? What is causing all this negativity and hate mongering? In his blog post, Why do we hate each other so much? (5 reasons anger is the new epidemic) Christian Pastor and author Carey Nieuwhof gives five reasons.

1. Anonymity.

With more and more interactions happening on line, distance between people desensitizes us. You will say things to your service provider over the phone or online that you may not dare say if you were standing face to face. This is also why we are more aggressive when we get behind the wheel of a car. It may startle you that your sweet grandma becomes a "she devil" when she gets in the driver's seat. Cutting people off, honking the horn, yelling at drivers. Come on, you all do it, don't you?

It is because we are encased in a 3000 pound vehicle. You don't see the driver of the car you are tailgating as a person. No, you see him as the problem. So, you get aggressive. Way more aggressive that you would be in person.

It is the same in the grocery store when you have a grocery cart in your hands. There is something about having something between you and another person that makes you ruder. That is why, when you are online, it is dehumanizing so it is easy to mistreat people. It's never been easier to be known and to hide simultaneously, as it is online.

2. Hate sells better than love.

Online, hate generates more clicks than love. Long before the endless fake-news arguments of today, TV news and newspaper editors figured out that bad news sells. Outrage spreads faster than touchy feely. Even in headlines. Which one are you more apt to click on and read. *Love Each Other More* or *Why Do We Hate Each Other So Much?* Honestly?

3. Attention.

Thanks to technology, we have never been more connected than we are today and we have never felt more alone. In 2018, the British government appointed a Minister of Loneliness to deal with the deep isolation millions of people are feeling.

Sometimes lonely people will settle for any attention they can get. Sometimes you have to wonder if people who leave angry messages or comments online are really just lonely people looking for attention.

4. Too Much Information

From your social media feeds to breaking news flashes to minute by minute invasion of notifications and rings that disrupt our day, we are processing more information than any other generation in history. That is not good.

A few generations ago, our grandparents really only processed the information that needed to act on. When someone died, you knew them, you attended the funeral, maybe brought some food to the family to help out. You were part of the community that supported them.

Now, we are bombarded with news several times a day of mass shootings, plane crashes, typhoons. You are not personally connected and feel so powerless to do anything. We are inundated every day with emails, texts, status updates, information that we can barely process let alone do anything about. Do you know what it does to us? It makes us cynical. The more you know, the more cynical you can become. This is why most of us were much happier when we were younger. We were stupider! Ignorance is bliss.

Now, every day we are reminded that we weren't invited to the party. We aren't moving into the dream house that your childhood friend is or that 200 people died in a plane crash and all of it, leaves us sad. Many of us have no positive outlets for that sadness.

5. Anger gets you heard.

Anger can get you heard, even when you have nothing really to say. All you have to do is check out any political news feed online and you will see a whole litany of angry statements, not really saying too much at all. So what can we do in a culture that seems to be so divided and angry? Especially as those who declare to follow Jesus? How do we engage our increasingly hostile world? Well, if you have been with us over the past three weeks, you know that we are in a message series at North Park entitled, *A Generous Faith*. The premise for this series is that God held back nothing from humanity in order to save us from our sinful condition. He gave the very best he had to offer, his son, Jesus.

Jesus is the epitome of humility, servanthood and generosity. He gave his life on the cross to provide a pathway of redemption for us. All we need to do is accept him as Lord of our life and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, follow the way he has called us to live. The way of a life of a follower of Jesus is to be defined by among other things, generosity. To be a Christian is to live generously.

Generous is defined as *showing a readiness to give more of something, than is necessary or expected*. So the question we have been challenged with throughout this whole series is, *are we generous people?* To this point, we have looked at being generous with our forgiveness, time, talents, gifts, and our money and material possessions and this week, we come to kindness.

This may just be the area where our lives centred on Jesus can make the most "day to day" difference in our world, if we were generous with our kindness to one another. The world needs more kindness.

The Philosopher Plato wrote, *Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle*.

It was Shakespeare who mused: *Kindness in women, not their beautiful looks, shall win my love*.

The author of Proverbs stated,

Proverbs 3:3

*Never let loyalty and kindness leave you!
Tie them around your neck as a reminder.
Write them deep within your heart.*

While kindness may be disdained by the callous and go unappreciated by the insensitive, it is applauded in any cultured society. The value of human kindness cannot be overstated and if you are paying attention, it is actually all around us, every day. But we can miss it too often, can't we?

Just take a moment to think back over your day to this point. What expressions of kindness were offered to you? Maybe not grand gestures, just everyday kindness. Someone spoke an encouraging word or gave you a compliment. Someone held a door open. Someone did you a favour. Someone wished you a happy birthday on Facebook or brought you a coffee. Just small gestures that can go unnoticed in the course of a busy day. But, if we slow down and ponder them, they are there. You may even be surprised to consider how many of these thoughtful gestures you do instinctively every day.

The history of the word, "kindness"- in ancient Greek it is "Chrestotes", more familiar today is the Greek word, Kalosini, is interesting. Originally, it had to do with something that was useful or effective and could refer to people or things.

It could be used to define precious stones but also encompass traits such as honesty, friendliness, lovingness, goodness, generosity, compassion and benevolence. It is the opposite of brutal, harsh, hurtful, uncaring and rude.

For those of us who are Christians, this kindness is different than just being nice for nice sake. So that we feel good about something we do. No, kindness comes from the very essence of who we are as those created in the image of God.

Remember in *Genesis 1:27*, it says about humanity,

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

It is an indisputable fact that every good trait that humanity is capable of, ultimately is motivated by that which is found in the creator of life. In whose image we have been created.

Here's the thing. In the ancient pagan religions sometimes mentioned in the Old Testament, very seldom would the term "kind" be used to describe the gods they worshipped. That is because the heathen's despised the term. They thought it was beneath the dignity of majestic deity. Contrast that with the way our God, the God of the bible is described.

Psalm 106:1

Praise the LORD!

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

In the original language, love in this verse is actually, lovingkindness. The Apostle Paul describes the gift of Jesus for the salvation of Humanity an act of among other things, the kindness of God.

Titus 3:4-5

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.

It is this loving kindness that leads to repentance.

Romans 2:4

Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

It is our genuine encounter with the lovingkindness of God that convicts us to turn from the ways that we have been living apart from Him and turn back. To Him. To change the way we have been living for the better. That is repentance prompted by the kindness of God.

I think we can all agree that when we have encountered true acts of kindness, it impacts us doesn't it? In some cases, it convicts us of the ways we have been living that have lacked this kindness.

The only real car accident I have had was when I was a young school teacher. It was a snowy day and the roads were slippery. I was leaving the school I taught at and was headed home. I got caught in an intersection ready to turn left as the light was changing so I sped up and as I did, I fishtailed.

As I was regaining control over my car, the car coming from the other direction with a green light now, rear ended me. It was not a big deal. I have never been much into cars, usually driving an older used car, I think this one was a 1984 rust coloured Toyota Tercel that I had bought off my sister. Any damage would have been barely noticeable.

The other driver and myself pulled off to the side of the road. I was waiting for him to get out of the car and come to me, I figured it was his fault. He never came. So I got out went over to him.

It was snowy and cold and it was before cell phones so one of us would have to run over to the strip mall and call the police. I kind of sparkly said to him, *well I guess, I will go and call the police.* I had to climb over the snowbanks that lined the road. It was a busy day for fender benders so I was told we may have to wait awhile for the police to arrive. When I returned, I was ticked off. I stood along the sidewalk fuming and waiting. The man in the other car, rolled down his window and invited me to wait with him in his warm, much nicer car. I hesitantly accepted his offer.

He was in his 70's, I would have been around 30. I noticed the stark difference in our moods immediately. I was rattled and he was so calm, and kind. I will never forget how kind he was. We introduced ourselves. His name was Bill. He asked me a lot of questions about myself.

When I told him I was a school teacher just headed home, he laughed and said he was a former school teacher himself. When the police arrived, they asked the standard questions. That's when I found out that Bill was actually W.T. Townshend. The former Director of Education for the Waterloo School Board. My former boss! Of course, he didn't tell me that when I was acting like a jerk.

Today there is both a W.T. Townshend Public School and a W.T. Townshend YMCA in Waterloo, named after this man who died in 2002.

The web site of the school that bears his name says this about him;

Bill Townshend was a man of integrity, a positive role model and a highly respected educator who valued all children. He could connect with people with a simple smile, a gentle nod, a look in his eye or a gesture. He fought against injustice, cruelty, unkind remarks, dishonesty and discrimination. Bill remained humble and grateful for his life. He believed if you did your best, the best would come back to you.

It didn't surprise me to discover that among all of those things, Bill Townshend was also Christian and his gentle, kind demeanor impacted my young life. So much so, that I remember our encounter over 25 years later. His example of kindness motivated me to demonstrate more kindness in my life.

Have you ever had your life impacted by someone who has demonstrated Godly kindness to you? It is something you don't soon forget.

If we are to emulate our God, to be his image bearer, we will cultivate kindness in our lives. Scripture tells us that those who neglect our Creator's kindness will suffer his wrath. This kindness thing is a big deal. So it would be no surprise that Jesus, the son of God also exemplified kindness in his actions to others, would it? Just think of the encounters that Jesus had with people all throughout the gospels. One thing that remains consistent is his kindness.

His treatment of the woman who had been apprehended by the Pharisees and accused of adultery exuded the spirit of gentleness and compassion. Oh, he didn't condone her sin but the manner in which he engaged her was so kind, so respectful and so loving.

Or what about the way that Jesus dealt with Judas? The one who would betray him and send him to his death. When this traitor approached Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane kissing him, the signal to the authorities that this was their wanted man, Jesus gently says to him,

Matthew 26:9

"My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for."

Kindness exemplified to the very end.

So, the bible describes the kindness of God, the kindness of the son of God, Jesus. So, how would you expect the bible to call those who seek to follow Jesus, to live?

The New Testament says a great deal about the way that kindness is to permeate the lives of Christians.

In that familiar passage on love in,

1 Corinthians 13:3-4, the Apostle Paul says,

If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

Love is patient and kind.

Then it goes on to list a whole bunch of attributes of love, but did you catch it? Love is kind. Is the love that you demonstrate towards others, kind? As I was writing out this line, I actually had to pause and ponder it for a moment. I thought of the love that I have for my wife, Carolyn. We have a long history. We go back to when we were both nine years old. Next month, we will have been married 35 years.

I love her passionately, but my conviction is that my love for her is not always kind. Remember kindness encompasses honesty, friendliness, lovingness, goodness, generosity, compassion and benevolence. My love can be selfish towards her, stingy and demanding.

A couple of weeks ago, we went to see *EndGame*, the supposed final movie of the thousands of Marvel comic movie series. As you can tell, it isn't really my thing but Carolyn, she has seen them all. She loves them, analyses them and asks a lot of questions. She was looking forward to seeing this movie for weeks. I simply took up space in the seat beside her. It was a pretty good movie but, it was 3 hours long!

My greatest accomplishment was that I didn't fall asleep. I was pretty proud of myself. When the closing credits came up, I was ready to go. I figured I had endured enough, I actually thought I should get some sort of "*Husband of the Year*" Award. But Carolyn paused. *Come on, let's go!*, I said. Pause, pause. What was she waiting for? With one last plea to leave, I eventually left and went to get the car.

It was on the drive home that I discovered that Carolyn wasn't real pleased with my impatience. What I discovered was that Marvel movies usually have a special surprise at the end of the closing credits that gives a little hint of something to come in the future. Carolyn was waiting for it. This is something that gives her joy and for all that she gives and sacrifices for me and our family, for the sake of having to wait another five minutes, I had squelched that joy. I don't want to squelch my wife's joy! When she sees me coming I want her to think, *here comes my joy giver* not my joy taker!
Love is Kind.

I am convicted of that in my relationship with my wife and my children these days. I tend to have a sarcastic sense of humour and at times that can be cutting and unkind to the ones I love the most.

In the New Testament book of Galatians, the Apostle Paul gives this encouragement to the Galatian Christians.

Galatians 5:16

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives.

He then follows it with this;

Galatians 5:22-23

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus says that you can tell a lot about a person by the fruit that their lives produce. For Christians, our lives are to be marked by the fruit of the Spirit which includes kindness.

Is kindness evident in your life? Remember, this whole series on a Generous Faith is not to leave you with an overwhelming guilt that you have to try harder to incorporate these qualities in your life.

I have to be more forgiving, more generous with my time, talent, money, possessions. So much to do. How do I fit this all into my schedule, Paul? No. It is about turning into Jesus.

With our focus and attention on Jesus and not ourselves, generosity in all areas of our lives will

prevail. The spirit will lead us into generous living when we rely on Him. Do you see that?

So what is the application for us today?

As I said, first and foremost, it is a turning into Jesus and inviting him to live in and through you and demonstrate opportunities to let His kindness in you, touch the lives of those you encounter every day.

It is the antidote to the rage and anger that seems to be so prevalent in our society. Each day I think we need to ask ourselves;

1. How do we demonstrate kindness to Strangers?

Hebrews 13:2

Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

As Christians, we are to look for opportunities to demonstrate kindness to anyone we encounter each day, even strangers. Maybe, especially strangers. That may include; the waitress in the diner, the seat mate on the plane or the person at the grocery checkout. Everyone just seems to be so on edge these days, have you noticed? Maybe you are one of these people. Ready to explode at the slightest inconvenience. We can disarm them with our kindness. With a simple caring gesture. Try it.

The Roman ruler Julian, who reigned a brief period in the mid-fourth century A.D. and who despised Christianity, nonetheless unwittingly paid a glowing compliment to the early Christians when he said;

As children are coaxed with cake, so have these Christians enticed the poor to join them by kindness. Strangers they have secured by hospitality. By affecting brotherly love, great moral purity and honouring their dead, they have won the multitude.

Generous kindness marked these early Christians lives and it impacted the people around them.

The second question we need to ask each day;

2. How do we demonstrate kindness to the people we know?

This includes our friends, neighbours, coworkers, classmates. We live in such a cut throat world don't we? So much competition in the work place and school. Jealousy and petty rivalries can crop up.

A neighbour builds a fence or you encroach too much onto their property. Anger wells up. How can we disarm them with kindness? Here is the thing.

You may demonstrate kindness to a neighbour and never change their negative attitude. They may continue to be ornery and unpleasant.

Carolyn and I had a neighbour like that once. It didn't matter what we did, they always had a compliant. Our continued attempts weren't so much about changing their heart but about a continual reminder to us to keep our heart soft towards others, even those who are difficult to love.

The third questions we need to ask;

3. How do we demonstrate kindness in the home?

The home can be such a battle ground in our culture today. Moms, dads, husbands, wives, children, grandparents, we can be brutal to each other. Words cut deeply. The way we can treat each other sometimes is so degrading and dishonouring. As I confessed, this one can slip me up at times.

In one of the most compelling passages of scripture found in Proverbs 31, it describes the wife of noble character. Among the many qualities that she is praised for is kindness.

Proverbs 31:26

*When she speaks, her words are wise,
and she gives instructions with kindness.*

Is there any doubt that if more homes were saturated with kindness, there would be far less marital strife and divorce? There would be less teenage rebellion and a much greater degree of family connectedness and unity.

The fourth question we need to ask ourselves;

4. How do we demonstrate kindness in the church?

Unfortunately, strife and division has been part of the church since the very beginning.

In fact, Paul had to chastise the Ephesian church for their nonsense when he said,

Ephesians 4:31-32

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

How many of the problems in the church would be mended if we were just kinder to one another? One of the greatest things I learned from my children playing minor hockey had nothing to do with hockey but with conflict resolution. Our coaches had a *24 hour rule*. If there was something that happened in the course of a game that upset you as a parent, something the coaches did, you were encourage to not react out of the emotion in the moment but take it home and process it. Give it 24 hours. If it was still something you felt you needed to discuss after 24 hours, then you were welcomed to contact a coach. But many times after processing it, it just didn't seem like such a big deal anymore. You put it into perspective and cooler and kinder heads prevailed.

What if we did that in the church? Before we react to an Elder Board decision, something about worship or the sermon or a programing issue in children's ministry, we took 24 hours to process it. Now, this doesn't mean we don't want your constructive comments, we just appreciate it more when it is coated with kindness.

Imagine if those of us who call ourselves Christians, were generous with our kindness? Not just two times a year but every day. If we demonstrated kindness to strangers, to people we know, to our families and in the church. See kindness is no small thing. It is powerful enough to change the hearts of both the giver and receiver.

Every day, we have opportunities to share kindness. It is in us to give because of the spirit of a kind and

compassionate Heavenly Father and Son dwells in us. Will we look away or will we engage our sometimes hostile world and be generous with our faith as we are kind to those God brings into our life?

Points to Ponder

A Generous Faith ~ Kindness

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Are you familiar with the random acts of kindness movement? Have you participated in practicing random acts of kindness? What did you do? What was the response from the people you bestowed kindness upon? Have you ever been on the receiving end of a random act of kindness? What happened and how did it make you feel?
2. Discuss this idea that the world seems to be an angrier place. Have you experienced people that you engage with becoming more agitated than usual? What do you think contributes to people behaving this way in our culture?
3. How is kindness the antidote to anger and hatred? How have you seen this play out in your life? What are some examples of when you have seen kindness deescalate anger?
4. Ponder and discuss the kindness of God. How does the kindness of God lead to our repentance? Why is kindness such an important attribute of Christians?
5. Describe an encounter you had with someone who really impacted you because of their kindness.
6. Discuss some ways that you can demonstrate kindness to strangers, to people you know, in your home and in the church. See if there are some practical steps you want to encourage one another with to ensure that kindness is played out in your life.

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray for specific opportunities to practice generosity through kindness to strangers, to people you know, in your home and in the church.