

Be Just. Be Kind. Be Humble.: 1. Be Kind

Colossians 3:12-17

October 9, 2022

Pastor Bethany Nelson

This fall, my Mom has been doing a bit of purging around the home. With all of her kids grown and in homes of their own, it is time, she says, to get rid of some of the “stuff” that we left behind. A few weeks ago, Mom had me go through some of the “treasures” she found. Including a whole rack of *dress up clothes*. You remember those days? Our dress up bin was filled with old bridesmaid dresses and dresses from school dances that my Mom and aunts wore. But for us as young girls? We were in heaven! We felt like princesses as we twirled. The costumes transported us to another time and place, and our imagination came to life.

In our reading today, Paul uses the metaphor of clothing to talk about our faith in Christ. Paul says we are to strip away our old selves and “put on Christ”, clothing ourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Following Jesus, says Paul, means to set aside our instincts of rudeness or flairs of anger or apathy. We should shed our impatience and self-importance. And as Pastor Tami reminded us last week, we set aside dreams of greatness, and clothe ourselves in the goodness of God.

Sometimes, these new clothes might be a bit ill fitting at first. Like a tag that scratches, it might take time to fully put on the clothes of Christ, to make them our own. In looking to put on our suits of kindness and compassion, we might still have the “scratch” of impatience or rudeness. Like all disciplines, it takes practice. And lucky for us, we serve a God who invites us to make a life long *practice* of learning to follow in loving kindness. Ours is a God who promises newness of life and resurrection. That is, a chance to start again, for every time we mess up. And a hope, that by clothing ourselves in Christ’s care, we can make the world a better place. We can narrow the gap and bring upon the Kingdom of God here and now.

We live in a world that is hungry for the Kingdom of God. The prophet Micah lived in such a world as well. And when the people wondered how they are to live to make a difference? Micah said, “What does the Lord require of you? But to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God”

Being kind, God says, will change the world.

Now, let us not mistake this for niceness. God does not tell us to be nice, as a parent sending their kid off to play. God says: love kindness. The two words are often mistaken for one another. But *being nice* is a response to social conditioning of how we should act in situations. Being nice is about behaving in ways that are pleasing or agreeable. Being nice aims to keep the waters calm, and to avoid making waves.

But kindness? Kindness is a *verb*. The Hebrew word for Kindness is *hesed*. It can be defined in many ways, but the most basic definition describes, not a behavior, but an action on behalf of someone in need. Kindness is acting in ways that are helpful to others. *A nice person may tell a neighbor they are sorry that they are sick — while a kind person may drop off some soup or offer to pick up groceries for them. A nice classmate, witnessing someone being bullied, might tell them, in private, that they don't deserve it. A kind person might stand up in the moment, telling the bullies to stop or getting a teacher involved. The marked difference is the kindness is acting in service to others, knowing it might cause disruption to the status quo.*

What does the Lord require of us, asks Micah. Loving Kindness. Action on behalf of others in need.

When it comes to showing kindness, we might think that the people who have *experienced* compassion in their lives will have the easiest time showing it to others. We’d think that if doing this one thing was hard for me, I will show kindness more easily to you... But, a study by the Kellogg School of Business has shown us the opposite is actually true. They found “people that endured a hardship and *less likely* to show compassion for someone struggling with the same hardship, compared with people with no experience in that situation. And

yet the research shows we tend to assume just the opposite, seeking comfort from people who are unlikely to offer it.” What they learned is that instead of spreading kindness, our instinct is to say: I made it through, now why can’t you?

“In one experiment, they asked participants in a polar plunge—an outdoor swim in frigid temperatures—to volunteer as research subjects. The participants were approached before their swim. Those who were willing to volunteer were divided into two groups—they either took a quick questionnaire before their swim or within a week after plunging. Participants in both groups read about a man named Pat, who like them had decided to take a polar plunge. Yet, when it came time to run into the water, Pat balked and did not complete the plunge. The participants then reported their levels of compassion and contempt toward Pat. Those who completed the questionnaire after taking the plunge were less likely to be compassionate toward Pat and more likely to feel contempt for him compared with participants who completed the study before their own plunge.”

The researchers believed that people easily forgot how hard it was for them. And just as easily forgot the acts of kindness they received, creating instead, an internal narrative that they did it alone. We know we do not live or jump alone, right? We are all recipients of God’s kindness and have all seen it shared with us through others. Because God calls us to another way. God calls us to be clothed in kindness, humility, compassion. To make our faith a *verb* and put it into action by doing justice and loving kindness.

How is it then, that we do this? How do we set aside our human nature and *clothe ourselves* in the attributes of Christ? We’re going to do this through *three simple steps*: Pray. Pay Attention. Practice.

The first step, in almost all of our life is **PRAYER**. Pray to God daily for guidance and wisdom. Ask God to reveal opportunities for you to do justice and love kindness. And seek God’s forgiveness and healing for the hard edges in your heart. We pray to God to remind us that ours is a God of abundance. The well of justice, kindness, and love will not run dry. But every time we partner with God? We create more. More goodness. More kindness. More love. More space for others to be *clothed in Christ*, too.

A few years ago, I met a pastor who had made it a goal to do 10 kind things each day. Big or small actions done to care for others. He said he started every day by asking God to keep his eyes and heart open. And then, he put ten pennies in his left pocket. As he walked, the pennies shook together, sometimes making noise. A physical reminder of his goal and pray. But then, as the day continued, with every opportunity to act kindly, he would move a penny from his left to his right pocket. His goal was simple: end the day with every penny moved. At the end of the day, he would pray for those he served and thank God for God’s faithfulness. You might not use pennies to guide your prayers into actions, but whatever you do: **PAY ATTENTION**. You see, God promises to hear our prayers and will respond. But it is up to us, to notice the ways God is nudging us, the opportunities God is revealing.

On our way home from Leadership Institute last week, I notice a container of cheerios ahead of me on the floor. It was a plastic container that parents use with little ones – it won’t break, it’s easy to get a little out without making a mess, with handles for small hands. I almost walked passed. We don’t touch other things in the airport, right? This was not my cheerio, not my problem. But then, a little voice inside of me remembered how hard it is to travel with littles. And how helpful those those containers of cheerios were with my own kids. I picked it up. And looked ahead... there was a family in front of me. Like most families on trips: they had full hands. Dad was carrying a young toddler, with a full backpack on his back. Mom had full arms too, pulling suitcases behind her. And they were in a hurry, rushing from one gate to the next. And wouldn’t you know? The toddler was starting to fuss about. I picked up my pace and caught up with them. After getting their attention, the toddler reached happily for the cheerios, a smile on their face. Mom looked relieved, “thank you! You have no idea how much trouble we’d be in if she didn’t have that when we sat!”

Was this a big thing? Of course not. Cheerios are not life changing moments, even if they are tasty. But it was an act of kindness toward this family. It would have been easy to ignore the container. It would have been *nice*

to pick up and toss it. But it was *kind* to deliver back into the little one's hands. Pay attention to that little voice within. That is the Spirit at work in you, nudging you to see an opportunity around you. Alright, so to follow God's command to love kindness, we're going to:

Pray. Pay Attention. Practice.

You've started every day by asking God in *prayer* for opportunities to be kind. You've spent your day, pocket full of pennies, *paying attention*. And now? You're going to keep on *practicing*. Each step requires practice. You're going to practice praying every day. You'll practice paying attention. And you'll practice being kind. And every time you flex those muscles of kindness, it will come easier. Part of practicing is noting the times we've messed up. It might be you, at the Polar Plunge, forgetting how scary and cold it was to jump, and missing an opportunity to be kind. It might be you who sees the cheerios, and in the rush of your day, steps right past them. It might be you, who remembers a really hard time in your life, where you missed out on *receiving kindness*, and you need space practice offering a grace you never experienced.

Author, pastor, and "kindness enthusiast" Bruce Reyes-Chow¹ defines kindness as:

Kindness is accepting that each person is a created and complex human being, and treating them as if you believe this to be true.

With a definition like this, its easy to see how important pray, paying attention, and practice is. To fully embody the kindness of God, is to set aside our own ego, to clothe ourselves in Christ, and to act with the belief and intention that all people are made in God's image. And one of our jobs as Christian's, is to help the world believe this, too. It means setting aside our own desires to look good. Or to be great. And instead, seeing the world as Christ intends: beloved and good. Fred Rogers, the beloved children's show host and presbyterian pastor, once said,

Knowing that we can be loved exactly as we are, gives us all the best opportunity for growing into the healthiest of people.

God loves you, just as you are. God looks at you and calls you good. And this same God invites you into a life of being just, being good, and being humble. Through prayer, paying attention, and practice – we can clothe ourselves in Christ. And together, we will change the world. God has lit a spark within us all, that can set off a series of events that brings change and transformation. When we invite you serve through things like Make A Difference Days – serving at Feed my Starving Children or Habitat. Giving to UMCOR. Serving here by making coffee or teaching our youth and kids. In all of these ways, and more, you are making faith a verb: putting into action the kindness you have received from Christ. A kindness that will change the world... just watch:

One day, one act of kindness... one spark to change the world. Let us pray:

Almighty God, you call us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. But more than call us to this life, you equip us for it, and promise to be with us always. Move among this day. We want to follow you more closely. We want to be clothed in your compassion, kindness, and goodness. Give us guidance for how to follow you, and the wisdom to discern it. Make us to pay attention to the people and places you set before us. Give us opportunities to practice – in abundance, dear God. In the name of your Son, our Savior, Brother, and Lord, we pray. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 9, 2022

Weekly Prayer

Loving God, you see us and know us. You forgive us and call us to follow anew. Make us a people who reflect your goodness towards one another. Help us cultivate your spirit of kindness in ourselves and reflect to others what you have so freely given to us. Amen.

Monday, October 10

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-13

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other.

Observation

In just two short verses, Paul gives a lifetime's worth of work. Following Jesus is called a *practice*, because we spend our entire lives learning and growing as disciples. Paul doesn't expect these qualities to come quickly or easily, and yet as God's "chosen ones," we are invited to practice living into the kingdom of God today.

Application

Paul called all of Christ's followers to "put on" five qualities: "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." When have you showed those qualities toward someone you love, or had that person show them toward you? What other responses might you or they have chosen? Would those alternatives have made things better or worse?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, please keep shaping me into a person of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Give me the grace to forgive as you've forgiven me. Amen.

Tuesday, October 11

Scripture: Colossians 3:15-17

The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.

Observation

Paul went on from the words we read yesterday to tell the Colossian Christians, "The peace of Christ must control your hearts." He wrote that to people who lived in a world that was cruel and unpredictable. The Greco-Roman world casually discarded friends and lovers, and often showed its Christian citizens hatred, violence, and scorn. Paul's counsel about peace, praise and gratitude was a survival manual for people who lived in a tumultuous time.

Application

Verse 17 took in a lot of ground: "WHATEVER you do, whether in speech or action, do it ALL in the name of the Lord Jesus." What does it mean to you to do whatever you do in Jesus' name? How can you work, shop, face a speeding highway or traffic jam "in the name of the Lord"?

Prayer

Holy One, help me to be a thankful person no matter what comes my way today. Let your peace more and more control my heart and my words. Amen.

Wednesday, October 12

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-5

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other.

Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:

Observation

Though he wrote many profound and challenging passages, the Apostle Paul was deeply practical. In verse 1 of today's reading, he listed four spiritual benefits that can be ours in Christ. But in verses 2-4, he appealed to his readers to live their day-to-day lives in ways that made those spiritual qualities into walking, breathing realities.

Application

In verse 2, Paul wrote, "Complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other." God created each of us unique, with our own minds and personalities. How can you live out the principles of this verse while honoring your God-given uniqueness?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, make me a person of kindness and compassion. Help me to find greater joy by aligning my mind and heart with yours. Amen.

Thursday, October 13

Scripture: Proverbs 15:1-4

A sensitive answer turns back wrath,
but an offensive word stirs up anger.
The tongue of the wise enhances knowledge,
but the mouth of a fool gushes with stupidity.
The LORD's eyes are everywhere,
keeping watch on evil and good people.
Wholesome speech is a tree of life,
but dishonest talk breaks the spirit.

Observation

These four verses from Proverbs give us four sayings that tell us the power of words – both to damage and to heal. We've all been on the receiving end of both, but as we dive into God's invitation to *loving kindness*, we do so by also *speaking* kindly to others.

Application

These proverbs do more than urge us to watch what and how we speak, they inspire us to examine our hearts. Does responding with anger usually make things better or worse? Does responding with kindness make a different impact?

Prayer

God of life, guide my thoughts, my words, my actions. Help me to *lean in* to the way of life to which you have called me. Shape me by your Spirit, uphold me by your grace. Amen.

Friday, October 14

Scripture: Ephesians 4:32

Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.

Observation

Throughout the fourth chapter, Paul offers instructions for Christian living. Among them are words that are echoed throughout Paul's writing (and all of scripture): calls to forgive, to be patient and to set aside anger. As well as calls to be kind... just as God has been all of these things to us.

Application

What does it mean to be kind, as God is kind? Take time today to reflect on God's grace towards you: how have you experienced God's kindness in your life? How might you reflect that more fully in your life?

Prayer

O Lord, light our path with your grace and love, so that we may always do the loving thing. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, October 15

Scripture: Micah 6:6-8

With what should I approach the LORD
and bow down before God on high?

Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings,
with year-old calves?

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with many torrents of oil?

Should I give my oldest child for my crime;
the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?

He has told you, human one, what is good and
what the LORD requires from you:

to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

Observation

The passage begins with the prophet asking, what shall I bring before God to be found worthy. God's response is to remind the prophet that their heart, not their possessions, will lead to the kingdom of God. We too, are tempted there is something we can do or achieve to *earn* God's approval. However, God's grace falls upon us as rain, without regard to our *earning* or *deserving*.

Application

As you've reflected this week on following God with loving kindness, what have you learned? Are there situations that have been easier to act and live in kindness? Is there a situation where you find yourself called to increase your kindness?

Prayer

God of grace, center and ground my life on you. Help me to see myself, and our world, as you see us: good and beloved children. Make me to love kindness, seek justice, and walk humbly with you. Amen.