

LIVING BEYOND YOURSELF – WEEK #6
The Fruit of the Spirit is Kindness – Part 1
1John 3:16-20

PATTI

Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit, which consists of nine characteristics that should be growing in the lives of those who truly believe in Jesus.

Tonight we' look at the fruit of KINDNESS, which in part, overcomes in us the sin of stinginess, of being tight-fisted.

I say in part because biblically, kindness is a word that encompasses a number of meanings, which is why we'll look at a very different aspect of kindness next week.

But to start tonight, can we at least admit that in our culture, we tend to equate kindness with "being nice."

Is that it? Or something else?

First, let's agree that Jesus never commanded Christians to be nice. That's because niceness tends to be appearance focused.

Basically niceness is public relations - managing the opinions of others about yourself in order to ensure that they have the highest opinion of you as possible.

So niceness, even when practiced with good intentions, is a performance. And doesn't equate to what Paul is talking about here.

In the original language of Paul's letter, the word kindness actually means "**loving deeds**". Which might lead us to ask, "What's the difference then between love and kindness?"

In English there's not much difference.

But even in English, love is a more general term and kindness, a more specific term.

Kindness is **loving deeds** - doing something for someone out of love, and what we're going to look at tonight is really quite different than what

we did last week. Last week we talked about patience as the fruit in our lives that overcomes anger, and the week before it was peace that overcomes anxiety - and as a result, it was a psychological study.

JEFF

Tonight you really have something that isn't so much a psychological study as it is a social study. The beauty of the Christian faith and the Bible is that it can't be seen fully through just one lens, or understood through just one framework.

If you have a psychological bent, it won't matter what you teach, study, or read, you'll easily turn it into a text about *"How faith helps me with my personal problems."*

On the other hand are other people who have a social bent. They're concerned about justice and social change, and every time they read the Bible they tend to run the text through that filter, so that whenever they teach or read, or study, they're looking at the social implications of it.

But the beautiful thing about the Scripture is that it's truth. And as such it has something to say about every aspect of our lives. Kindness has to do with social relationships, and here in 1 John 3, we're told one of the marks of a real Christian is that your love finds expression in deeds of kindness, especially to those with material, physical, and economic needs.

"This then is how we know that we belong to the truth," our text insists, *"and how we set our hearts at rest ..."*. Not just here, but in a number of places, the Bible says one of the ways you can tell you're a real disciple of Jesus is if you care for the poor.

As usual, we'll break down this fruit of the spirit tonight into a number of aspects, so we can examine it more carefully. So, first Patti, what is the definition of kindness?

PATTI

1. What is the definition of kindness?

You touched on it in some ways.
 But for our purposes tonight let's call it
“practical generosity.” It doesn't just mean loving.
 It doesn't just mean you have a positive, warm, or
 even caring feeling for someone.

That wouldn't necessarily make us like Jesus, would it?
 Think about the kinds of things Jesus did.
 He fed the hungry, healed the sick, laid his hand
 on lepers, dined with outcasts.

He rebuked the hypocritically religious people,
 in hopes of bringing them into a fuller understanding
 of the character of God.

For Jesus, showing the lovingkindness of God
 by living a life of practical generosity
 was, by definition, **inconvenient** and **costly**,
 as it is for us.

In fact, the list of things I just mentioned about Jesus are
 the very reasons that the authorities arrested and beat
 and mocked him, and hung him on a cross.

So my hunch is that kindness that isn't inconvenient and costly
 in terms of time or money or comfort or energy or talents is probably
 just marketing your reputation for being “nice”.

JEFF

God has been teaching me about kindness over the past
 10 months or so, at my gym of all places.
 There's a guy exactly my age there, I'll call him Bob.

Bob is the youngest resident at an assisted living facility
 near my house - a veteran with PTSD and a host of physical
 ailments that are not usually associated with people his age.
 The only times Bob can really get away from his facility
 is to walk to the public library or wait for the city bus to
 take him to and from the gym.

I asked Bob one day if he wanted a ride and that has been (mostly) our daily routine ever since. So much so that Bob is the only non-family member in my phone's quick-access favorites list, besides my family and the men in my small group. Did I mention that Bob is a practicing Buddhist?

Sometimes after the gym, he asks me if we can stop at Kroger to get a few things. And then sometimes he doesn't have money to pay for the couple things he gets, so I do.

I didn't hear from Bob for about 4 or 5 days recently, and then he called to say he tested positive for Covid and was being quarantined. He just wanted me to know, and I'm fine. But he asked if I could bring him some orange juice and drop it at the front door. So in the middle of a busy day this week, I went to Kroger and did that.

I hesitate to share that story because it could sound like tooting my own horn, which is beside the point. The point is that in order to be Bob's friend, in order to show him the lovingkindness of Jesus, it is almost always inconvenient and costly. Because Bob has lots of needs.

PATTI

And another other thing we need to point out kindness is that it doesn't depend on the other person being kind or loveable or deserving.

We show kindness because it is our nature in Christ to be kind - because the Spirit of God is working into our hearts and minds this aspect of Christlike character.

Think of kindness as **valuing** people, and as a result, **investing** in them... especially **needy people**, You put your time, money, talents, and deeds where your heart is, Jesus said. So if you have a house and you value it, how much time, effort and money are you willing to invest in it? My hunch is, a lot. We just finished putting in flooring, for example.

Not cheap. But our house is the single most valuable thing or possession that we have.

Biblically, kindness is an attitude that sees human beings as so infinitely valuable and precious that you can't really invest in one "too much."

v. 17 -

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in that person?"

JEFF

2. Then what is the opposite of kindness?

If kindness is practical generosity, then it's opposite is stinginess. And stinginess is about way more than just money.

Have you ever been sitting with someone in a room full of people (probably not lately because of social distancing - some of you remember this)... you're sitting in a room full of people trying to have a conversation with a person seated next to you, and they're scanning the room to see who else there may be to talk to...

What that does is it makes you feel devalued and diminished - like you don't matter, because this person is not willing to invest even a little bit of time in you. But they are eager to invest in others that they are scanning the horizon to spot.

Kindness, for lack of a better term, is action-oriented... **deed ministry** - the meeting of felt needs through deeds. The Bible tells us all of our problems come from sin. There would be no misery if there wasn't sin.

In Genesis 3, we see an outline of how all of our problems immediately flowed out of the decision by Adam and Eve to be their own gods or masters.

The result of the fall is alienation
 - alienation from God (spiritually),
 - alienation from ourselves (psychologically),

- which is why Adam hid from God, out of fear...
- alienation from each other (socially) – which is why Adam and Eve not only blame one another, but also suddenly realize that they are naked.
Now they are ashamed. They can't be completely honest, truthful and vulnerable with each other, because they have covered up & failed to come clean with God.
 - and lastly the fall brings alienation from nature, which is why God says Adam will have to work the dusty ground, which becomes uncooperative and produces thorns and weeds.

PATTI

So in addition to all the other effects of sin, we're alienated from the physical world and locked in a battle that we will lose when we return to dust.

This alienation from nature is why we die, and get sick.
It's why there's disease and natural disasters.
It's why we build buildings to keep nature out half the time. Because it's no longer our friend.

All this alienation means that there are a variety of different needs people have that are not being met.
What should a Christian do about that?

Jesus healed the results of sin in all four of these areas...
spiritual, psychological, social, and physical, by forgiving, healing, and teaching... by touching the leper, who was an outcast... by multiplying wine and bread so there would be enough, and much, much more.

Healing is kingdom work, and God gives us gifts of the Spirit for this purpose. We won't look them up tonight, but you'll find them in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and Romans 12.

These passages say that in the body of Christ, each of us has different gifts for the common good...
“**word gifts**” like counseling, preaching and teaching, exhortation and evangelism. But also “**deed gifts**” like helps, mercy, and service.

Our inner needs are met with words, and they are hidden. But our outer needs are very obvious, and met by deeds of kindness.

JEFF

Yes, it's interesting that in the old way of organizing church you had elders and deacons. Biblically, **elders** were officers who to ensured that the Word of God was being proclaimed faithfully and regularly.

But **deacons** were officers who make sure that the church was putting its money where its mouth was, and really helping people with needs.

here are word officers and deed officers.

Word gifts and deed gifts.

Luke 24:19 says that, "Jesus Christ was mighty in word and deed." Are we?

In Isaiah 1:10–17, God says to his people through the prophet, "You go to church, you give money, you fast and pray, you read the Bible, but is this the fast I choose, to loose the yoke of oppression, to bring the hungry into your home?"

What it's saying is that you can be religious and still not be a true Christian unless you're kind.

Patti preached on Matthew 25 Sunday...

on the final day of judgment, where Jesus will divide the true Christians from the false ones., and say to one group, "You can come into my kingdom." Why?

"Because I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was naked, and you clothed me..." and so forth. To the second group he says the opposite.

Why would Jesus say these things when everything else the Bible s is so clear that we're not saved by our deeds? .

No, we are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

So what is this Matthew 25 parable about then?

Deeds of kindness can't save you,

But deeds of kindness can show whether or not your faith is real or just lip service.

PATTI

Lutherans tend to be very fond of Ephesians 2:8-9, which says...

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

But we need to keep reading through v. 10 so that we don't forget...

¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This work includes the fruit of kindness.
that makes you more willing to sacrifice for others;
more eager to give and to burden yourself for
folks who don't have the same standard of living
that you do.

The world can't see us meeting inner spiritual needs,
at least not before they are converted.
But the world can see us meeting people's outer needs...
like the beds that Bed Brigade builds for adults and
children forced to sleep on the floor.

Julian, who was one of the early Roman emperors, hated Christians.
He wrote to his friend who was a pagan priest, about
why he couldn't exterminate Christianity.
"Nothing," he said, "has contributed to the progress
of the superstition of these Christians as their charity to strangers.
The impious Galileans provide not only for their own poor, but for ours as well."

Everybody took care of their own kind.
But Christians were promiscuous in this regard.
They took care of everybody, regardless of
race, ethnicity, religion, political loyalties or background.

Of course, that's not the main reason the church grew.
But Julian and others in the early Roman world were baffled by
the Christians because they were totally different than anyone else
in two ways.

First, they were **sexually chaste**. They only had sex inside marriage.
Secondly, they were **unbelievably generous to the poor**.
Which led the Romans and Greeks to conclude
"These people are weird."

Do in Columbus and Grove City say that about us?
"Gosh, those folks over at St. John's are weird."
My hunch is that if the church today were characterized
by just those two things, people would take notice and
want to know more.

JEFF**3. What is the counterfeit of kindness?**

The counterfeit of kindness is sentimentality or manipulation. Sometimes we say, "Look. I care about people with needs, but I'm pretty strapped myself right now."

Jonathan Edwards once quipped that when you say, "I can't afford to help people," what you really mean is "I can't afford to help people without it burdening me." You don't mean you can't do it. It just means it will hurt.

For example, here comes a person carrying a 50 pound burden. How are you going to help her bear it? You have to get at least 10 or 15 pounds on you so she only has to carry 35 or 40. Some of the burden and weight has to fall on you.

The Bible doesn't define who is needy with a tidy a poverty line. It doesn't say that for a family of four, if you're making less than this amount, then you're poor."

The bible simply defines a poor person as someone who has fewer choices about where to live and shop and get a good education... fewer choices about what to eat and what to wear.

In that context, then, what does, "Love your neighbor as yourself" mean? Do you wait until you're desperate or destitute before you take action and help yourself? Then we shouldn't wait until someone else is in the gutter to help them.

So who do you know right now who has a burden that needs to be shared? It's really that simple. Because after all, Jesus completely took the burden of your sin and mine upon himself... a burden he didn't deserve, that cost him everything.

This is hard, but kindness can probably be measured by how much your lifestyle has been changed or by how many choices you've lost as a result of serving the least of these. Someone will surely raise a question about panhandlers.

We pass see people every day who are in effect asking for money.

Does that mean I should just empty my wallet every time?
I'm pretty sure that doing that would be reactive rather than proactive.
Not that you should never respond to a request,
But reacting shouldn't be your primary mode of kindness ministry.

Besides, you have no idea where money will go if you give it, so don't. Addicts will simply use it to buy drugs or alcohol. So in order not to support that, it may be better, if it's safe, to offer groceries, a meal, clothing, or diapers instead of cash. My friend even keeps a couple bags of supplies like that in her trunk along with a couple of gift certificates, for that reason. She has a proactive plan.

PATTI

4. How do we cultivate this type of kindness in our lives?

If you are a Pharisee who believes that God accepts you because you're a pretty good person, then you're going to look at people in need with a self-righteous heart and conclude that they just need to try harder.

If on the other hand, you believe that you're spiritually bankrupt, and that your righteousness is like a filthy rag, if you believe you're a sinner saved by grace, then when you see somebody on the street who is illiterate, with few resources, someone who looks and dresses and smells bad,

then whenever you pass them, you have to say,
"Lord, that is what I look like to you spiritually?
It's like I'm looking in a mirror."

It doesn't matter what your politics are, whether you believe government ought to be helping the poor or the government ought to be completely out of welfare. Either way, you are like God, because it is your nature and the nature of the church to give.

You are like Jesus now... practically generous, and full of grace.

Prayer:

Lord, you are a generous, giving God who is open-handed with us in all your ways. Make us more like you this week. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, nudge us when an everyday occasion becomes an opportunity to serve someone sacrificially as you have served and saved us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.