

Whatever Happened to Kindness?

Luke 10:30-37

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The scar remains over the bridge of my nose, but the memory of the kindness of the man who placed a handkerchief over my open gash and drove my mother, my infant sister, and me to the hospital remains.

Although I was only three, I remember the small post office in Greenville, Alabama where my mother stopped to purchase some stamps.

While she paid for her stamps and held my infant sister, I wandered a few feet away to hop on some marble steps that went to the second floor.

When I fell, my face hit the stone steps and opened a gash across my face. Blood was everywhere. My mother asked for help.

A stranger stepped forward, pulled out his handkerchief and applied pressure to the wound. He put us in his car and drove us to the hospital where I received my first stitches.

While he didn't offer to pay for our bill, he was kind like the Good Samaritan that Jesus spoke about in his parable.

In that story, a stranger came by and helped a man that had fallen among thieves along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. What he did for the Jewish man likely saved his life. He attended to his wounds.

He made a sacrifice of time and money as he paid for the man's stay in an Inn where he took him until he could recover.

He said he would come back and pay more if it was needed, an additional act of kindness.

To describe his actions, Jesus said the Samaritan had "mercy on him." Some translations say "compassion." Others use "pity." The Greek word is *e-le-os*.

The wounded man had done nothing to deserve this help. The Samaritan did not know if the injured man had a good heart or an evil heart. He just helped him. Mercy is not based on merit.

An Old Testament equivalent is found in Psalm 36:7 and other places. The Hebrew word is "chesed," which the Bible translates as "lovingkindness." This is a word we don't use in our everyday conversation. The Bible likes to use it to describe the kindness that God has for us.

"How precious is your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings." (Psalm 36:7).

Of course, we are supposed to have this kind of kindness toward each other, which was the point of Jesus' parable.

But whatever happened to kindness, to lovingkindness?

Several years ago, I heard about radio stations sponsoring random acts of kindness. Then I began to hear about churches doing the same thing.

I have heard of churches giving away money to their members and asking them to give the money away in a random act of kindness. The next week people give testimonies of what they did with their money.

I recently heard a comedian say that she liked giving away money as long as it belonged to someone else.

Let's say you were eating at a restaurant and the waitress said, "Someone has paid for your bill tonight. He said he hoped that you have a blessed night."

Surprised and grateful you say, "Well, who was it? I'd like to thank him."

The waitress said, "Oh, it's not a him. It's a her. And there's no need to thank her. She's mad at her husband and she said she got his wallet and was spending his money."

That sort of takes the kindness factor away, doesn't it?

It's much easier to be kind when we are using house money and not our own.

The kindness God wants us to have is supposed to be personal and sacrificial. Mostly it is supposed to be built into the fabric of our lives. It is supposed to come from the heart.

I don't believe it was a random thing that the Samaritan took care of the injured Jewish man. It was part of his nature.

People are usually kind if it is in their nature to be kind. It wasn't in the nature of the Priest or the Levite to be kind. Part of the point of Jesus' story is that it should have been.

So, whatever happened to kindness?

I am saddened to say that many Christians have forgotten that kindness should be one of our calling cards.

On August 18, 1988, when George H. W. Bush received his party's nomination for president of the United States, he called for a "kinder, gentler nation." What happened to that? I long for that kind of leadership.

Unfortunately, Christians have come to be known for what we are against instead of what we are for.

Christians have come to be known for our judgment and not for our love.

Many Christians today look more and more like the Pharisees of Jesus' day rather than the Mother Theresa's of our day.

We are more concerned with being right than being kind. We are too quick to give advice and slow to listen.

We don't like walking a mile in someone else's shoes if we suspect those shoes have walked through pain, bankruptcy, through prison doors, through alcohol or drug rehabilitation, across a border, or if they have been in the food stamp line.

Sometimes, we just think we know what someone else has walked through, but we do not have a clue. Our unkindness wounds people in ways that we never dreamed because it hits them in painful places where they have been wounded before.

Why is it that we cease being kind, even though it is at the core of what Jesus taught?

Instead of building walls, we need to be building bridges to people who are like us and unlike us. Otherwise, we ARE the Priest and the Levite.

We might be religious, but we are not like Jesus.

We might be religious, but we are not compassionate.

We might be religious, but we are not a real neighbor.

We might be religious, but instead of being kind, our spoken language, body language, and attitudes say, "I do not value you." So, we pass by on the other side, or worse, we are actually the ones who inflict the pain.

We do it at the market, on the ball field, in the workplace, at church, in line to purchase our tags, at daycare, at school, to the waitress who serves our food, at the local drug store, at the fast food restaurant, and even to family members.

Somewhere we have learned that if we don't agree with the way someone lives, or with their morals, or with their politics or religious views, that it is O.K. to be unkind to them.

If we are disciples of Jesus, I appeal to you and challenge you to learn from Jesus. I challenge you to live like Jesus did.

1) Jesus loved people where they were, and he accepted them for who they were. Jesus was kind to Matthew and Zacchaeus, both tax collectors, people no one else was kind to. These men were

not kind to others. They took money from people who could not afford to give it. Rome got rich because men like these did their dirty work for them. Yet Jesus was kind to them. Because of his lovingkindness, they stopped taking people's money and become his follower.

Without Jesus' lovingkindness to them, do you think their lives would have changed?

2) Jesus showed lovingkindness to the woman at the well. She came to the well in the middle of the day alone, likely a sign that no one would be her friend and draw water with her. When no one else would befriend her, Jesus did. He spoke kindly to her, even though it was against the social customs of his day to do so and even though he knew her past. That day her life changed. Joy came into her life and hope for her future returned. She invited Jesus back to her village to meet people that had rejected her.

3) Jesus showed lovingkindness to a Roman soldier who came into the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest him. Peter used his sword and tried to kill him. He nearly succeeded, but only severed his ear. But Jesus showed kindness to a man that was a part of a group that would soon see that he received the maximum number of lashes before taking him to a cross to be executed. Later a Roman soldier stood at the foot of the cross and observed Jesus dying on the cross, and he said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

4) Jesus showed lovingkindness to a group of lepers that had been cast outside the city by their own people. Because of their skin disease, they were thrown out of the community. No one cared if they lived or died. But Jesus was not afraid to touch them. His touch was part of what healed them. He was kind to them when no one else was. They knew he cared for them.

5) Jesus showed lovingkindness to a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Most of the Pharisees showed open contempt for Jesus. They helped arrange his crucifixion. Jesus was well aware of their plots against him and their desire to trap him by their questions.

Yet when Nicodemus wanted to meet with Jesus under the cover of darkness, Jesus had no malice toward him, only kindness. The conversation he had with Nicodemus about eternal life changed his life. He became one of Jesus' disciples.

When Jesus died, Nicodemus was one of the men who took Jesus' body from the cross and helped prepare it for burial. Nicodemus learned kindness from Jesus. He did for Jesus one of the things Jesus could not do for himself. He buried him. She showed kindness even after his death. I could on and on with examples of how Jesus showed lovingkindness to people. You cannot speak about Jesus without talking about his kindness.

So, whatever happened to our own?

Why is it that when people hear the word, "Christian," kindness does not automatically come to their minds?

One of our problems is that we have been taught that when we disagree, we cannot be friends. We have been taught that when we are on

the opposite sides of an issue, we must demean, demoralize, and destroy the one that disagrees with us.

We forget that it is possible to hold convictions and give our neighbors the same right to hold opposing beliefs and still be kind.

One author wrote, “A life of radical kindness and a life of biblical faithfulness are not mutually exclusive.” In fact, they must go together, or we have failed to understand the life and ministry of Jesus. (Barry H. Corey, “Love Kindness, Discover the Power of a Forgotten Christian Virtue” P. 69)

Just because we love others and are kind to others does not mean that have to agree with them or the way they live.

Jesus gained a reputation for hanging out with “sinners.” Jesus did not agree with their theology. Yet he was kind to them. Jesus took several hits for befriending them.

However, Jesus understood that to redeem someone was to show him or her kindness. For Jesus, it was more important to love his neighbor than to agree with his neighbor. We don’t have to agree with people on every issue to show kindness.

Unfortunately, most of the examples we have today are those who tell that when we disagree with others, we must disassociate, demean, dismiss, and destroy them.

What has happened to kindness?

We have lost our stomach for it because some people who have disagreed with us have treated us this way. We have experienced these very same things from others. Those who disagree with us have treated us unkindly.

When we have been wounded, it tends to knock the kindness out of us. What seeps in in anger and often a desire for revenge.

Christians, in general, have been on the defensive, but instead of reacting with lovingkindness; many Christians have drawn swords like Peter. We have also drawn blood. In doing so, we have only created a battlefield.

Paul told the church of Rome, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:7).

How many times have you heard of someone leaving a church or leaving The Church because someone was unkind to them?

Sometimes, people that are pushed away fill eventually find acceptance in very poor versions of community that end up harming them because they are not based on the love of God.

It's sad when people find more acceptance and some initial kindness from Satan's sanctioned events or groups than they do among disciples of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul warned us that "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light." (2 Corinthians 11:14)

If we are to be more like Jesus, we don't have to impose Jesus on others, but instead, we just need to care about others.

We need to come alongside them and love them, show them that we care, so they will see Jesus through our kindness. Otherwise, very little we have to say about Jesus will ever ring true.

In his book, "Love Kindness," President Barry Corey tells the story of the time he spent at a retreat center. On his way there, he caught a ferry. While waiting for the ferry, he watched as two young college-aged boys engage in conversation with a man carrying two musical instrument cases, one smaller and one larger.

The seventyish man with a beard and white hair was kind to the strangers who happened to be traveling from Germany. They eventually asked him about the musical cases he was carrying.

One of the young men asked if he could play his guitar. The older man said he could.

While the young man strummed a few chords in beginner's fashion, the bearded man pulled out his fiddle and found the right key and began playing music that created a concert within that room.

Before long people were tapping their feet and bobbing their heads and enjoying their performance. (Pgs. 138-142)

Can't you imagine those boys from Germany phoning home and telling that story? That young man would have talked about the kind man with the musical instrument who made him feel like he was a performing artist on stage with an audience.

Every day we have the opportunity to come alongside someone and show him or her some kindness. We can share what we have, where we are, and sometimes it is as simple as conversation, a smile, opening to door for someone.

Other times, it is helping a young mother in distress, finding a way to keep someone who is struggling financially, taking time to listen to someone who is struggling with life.

Random is better than none at all, but God wants our kindness it to be a way of life. When we share our loaves and fish, God will bless what we have given, multiply it and make it go further than we ever imagined.

Jesus wants us to come alongside others, not pass by on the other side of them. It is when we come alongside them that they have an opportunity to learn from us the ways of Jesus.

It is alongside us that they might understand the Jesus has shown to all of us.

Leading people to Jesus rarely happens from a distance.

Not everyone will accept your kindness, but that's O.K. Some who reject your efforts may even wound you.

Jesus has taught to move on. There are plenty of others to be kind to and plenty of others that will respond.

The Apostle Paul said to the church at Colossae, you are "God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with kindness" (Colossians 3:12).

Today, where are you on the kindness meter? How do other perceive you? Who in your life have you passed by on the other side? Who are those close to you that you are not or have not been kind to? Who do you need to be intentional about coming alongside to be kind, so that they will feel loved and accepted?

Peter followed the voice of an angel and then the Spirit and he went to a road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. He came alongside an Ethiopian Eunuch who was reading the scroll of Isaiah but did not understand it.

Because of his kindness to him and their conversation, they eventually came to some water then Eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:37).

Perhaps by your kindness, someone will accept Jesus as his or her savior and ask to be baptized. Without it, why would they desire to know the God you profess to know?

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